

SUMMER 2019

REFUGEE INTEGRATION THROUGH INCLUSION

A WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH TO
FIGHTING CULTURAL DIVISIONS

EVENT REPORT



Cover image credits: [Matteo Paganelli on Unsplash](#)

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

EUROPE'S MIGRATION CHALLENGE

Integration is central to European immigration policies, yet often fails to deliver the expected benefits for both newcomers and local communities. Everyone should feel welcome and engaged in their community, concluded Friends of Europe's 18 June Policy Insight debate 'Refugee integration through inclusion: a whole-of-society approach to fighting cultural divisions'. During the debate, participants explored challenges and best practices when it comes to refocusing integration efforts on creating fully inclusive societies.

Held during the European Development Days, the debate was timely given recent EU elections and growing societal antipathy towards refugees and migrants. "We need to change the current conversation and mindset on migration and integration," said Shada Islam, Director of Europe & Geopolitics at Friends of Europe, "But this will be hard with more far-right MEPs [Members of the European Parliament] and the mainstreaming in many regular political parties of a toxic us-and-them narrative."

She advocated shifting the narrative to focus on building inclusive societies in which everyone has a stake and feels at home. This was also the message of Friends of Europe's new discussion paper 'Europe's migration challenge: from integration to inclusion'. The publication also calls for fresh European policies to reduce inequalities across the board and for the strengthening of networks that will allow newcomers to thrive – at home and in their jobs.

INCLUSION NOT INTEGRATION

Panellists agreed that Europe would benefit by moving on from antiquated concepts of integration. "'Integration' is more about being seen as a 'true European' regardless of the culture and knowledge of newcomers," said Shaza Al Rihawi, Founder of the Network for Refugee Voices and Member of the European Migrant Advisory Board. She highlighted that the concept of inclusion, on the other hand, suggests a sense of belonging. Members of an inclusive society work together as citizens to fulfil their rights and duties.

Achieving inclusive societies will not be easy, however. "It requires representation, more dialogue and a move away from the negative narratives on minorities," said Yasmine Ouhrane, 2019 Young European of the Year and European Development Days Young Leader.

As it stands now, newcomers continue to face discrimination despite integration efforts. "Even with legal status, these groups may struggle to get a job or engage as citizens," said Al Rihawi, highlighting the barriers faced by Muslim women wearing a veil as well as people with disabilities. Such messages are amplified when irresponsible

"It requires representation, more dialogue and a move away from the negative narratives on minorities"

Yasmine Ouhrane

2019 Young European of the Year and
European Development Days Young Leader

“Europeans must not airbrush the past”

Rozina Spinnoy

Founder of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Belgium

media outlets spread stereotypes about newcomers being lazy or coming to ‘take’ existing jobs, money and resources.

Though demonstrably false, stereotypes like these only serve to feed hate speech and hamper the growth of inclusive societies. Yet discrimination is not limited to newcomers alone. “Minorities are not related to the refugee category, they are immigrants’ descendants,” said Ouirhrane. “Across Europe their situations differ, but they face the same pattern of discrimination and exclusion that refugees do.”

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

In Europe, civil society has taken the lead so far on creating more inclusive environments. Now governments and institutions will need to step up and show increased political will in order to institutionalise inclusion.

Some caution that there may be administrative barriers to making these changes, however. The EU has a limited budget directed at migration and refugees, meaning that funding must be prioritised. As a result it is more often funnelled into integration initiatives, with an initial focus on settling newcomers’ legal status before moving on to the issue of inclusion.

Overcoming barriers to inclusion could also require taking another look at Europe’s own history – especially its colonial past – suggested Rozina Spinnoy, Founder of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Belgium. She called for better education on this topic: “Europeans must not airbrush the past. They should know that much of our wealth comes from colonising other continents.” Spinnoy also highlighted the importance of understanding people’s differences and recognising that fear often stems from ignorance.

The media also has a key role to play in education and awareness-raising. According to Shada Islam, Europe’s journalists and publishers should be “brought onboard” in efforts to tackle exclusion and when pushing for a focus on inclusion.

This view was echoed by Yasmine Ouirhrane, who drew attention to the crackdown on migrants and refugees by the current Italian government. This includes recent security laws – condemned by the United Nations – that limit or refuse access to the country’s ports for boats carrying refugees. In her view, “This is simply criminalisation of humanitarian work, so we should encourage the EU to introduce legislation to protect citizens engaged in such work.”

WHERE AND WHY INCLUSION WORKS

Taking a whole-of-society approach to inclusion is widely seen as the best way forward, as it creates dialogue between locals and newcomers and cultivates a sense of belonging. This approach is

valuable in a development initiative like the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)'s Qudra Programme.

The programme works with stakeholders at every level to help local authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to improve basic public services for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the local population. According to Team Leader Jenny Hornisch, the value of programmes like these is that “no one gets left behind.”

In order to ensure that such programmes are truly inclusive, it is essential to involve local authorities and the community. “Above all, we must listen to all groups in need, so that the inclusion process becomes coherent, coordinated and participatory,” added Hornisch.

Such efforts can also pay off in Europe. Shaza Al Rihawi described a German town whose mayor initially pushed back against a proposal to take in refugees. When higher authorities informed him that refusal was not an option, the mayor opened consultations with locals and refugees themselves to identify the needs and concerns of both.

As a result, accommodation to house the newcomers has been built. Some 250 refugees have settled down. Schools that closed due to lack of children have now reopened. Local factories struggling to find labour have given full-time fixed contracts to 70 refugees.

“This progress took hard work, many meetings and the right political attitude, but now everybody sees how an inclusive society can work well for all,” said Al Rihawi.

WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

In Belgium, inclusion-based efforts are gaining traction in urban areas thanks to a similar participatory approach. “Our projects, the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), are inclusion-focused,” said Rozina Spinnoy. For long-term success, she believes that this requires systemic change by taking a bottom-up, human-centric approach. In other words, listening to what newcomers want and need in order to participate fully in local society.

BIDs work with business and local authorities to create decentralised meeting spaces. “They include co-designed spaces for ethnic minorities and neuro-diverse people, or those with mental disabilities, offering everything from culture to creative crafts,” she added. Taking this a step further is Urban Maestro, her team's new project that seeks to improve spatial quality in cities across Europe by investigating urban design governance.

Policymakers and practitioners need to keep such inclusion-focused initiatives in mind when they are thinking about how to overcome inequalities in Europe. “We want a Europe that is strong, united and celebrates its diversity,” concluded Shada Islam. “Unity in diversity is a good motto, but we have to walk the talk.”

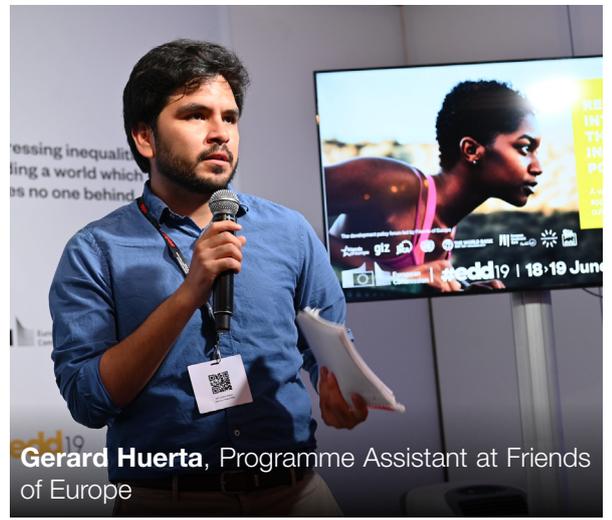
“Above all, we must listen to all groups in need, so that the inclusion process becomes coherent, coordinated and participatory”

Jenny Hornisch

Team Leader of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)'s Qudra Programme, Kurdistan Region of Iraq



Shada Islam, Director of Europe & Geopolitics at Friends of Europe



Gerard Huerta, Programme Assistant at Friends of Europe



Amanda Rohde, Programme Manager at Friends of Europe



Jenny Hornish, Team Leader of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)'s Qudra Programme, Kurdistan Region of Iraq



Shaza Al Rihawi, Founder of the Network for Refugee Voices and Member of the European Migrant Advisory Board



Yasmine Ouirhrane, 2019 Young European of the Year and European Development Days Young Leader



Rozina Spinnoy, Founder of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Belgium



Friends of Europe

Connect. Debate. Change.

+32 2 893 98 11

info@friendsofeurope.org

friendsofeurope.org

Friends of Europe is a leading think-tank that connects people, stimulates debate and triggers change to create a more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking Europe.