

## CO-DESIGNING AN INCLUSIVE EUROPE: NOTES ON THE ROUNDTABLE IN BRUSSELS

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Migration has different drivers and needs to be tackled with diverse approaches and policies (Caponio and Borkert 2010). Under the auspicious title *CO-DESIGNING AN INCLUSIVE EUROPE. Migration and migrants in the EU: Changing narratives – modifying practices – influencing policies*, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2022, coordinators and researchers of ten EU 2020 Horizon funded projects gathered together in the heart of EU quarters in Brussels to share findings, exchange experience among the participants, discuss with MEPs and EU officials, and to make policy recommendations based on diverse study approaches. The venue was organised in a hybrid format: presential in Brussels (at the Norwegian House of Research and Innovation), which gather 30 participants, and 262 participants took part in the online version. These were coordinators and researchers connected with the ten projects, but also representatives from CSOs/NGOs, the European Commission, and independent consultants.



On-site audience and participants. Photo: Matteo Cogliati



Anamaria Dutceac Segesten. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

The table below briefly introduces the ten projects participating in the roundtable and their main objectives.

<b>Horizon 2020 Project</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
<b>CHIEF</b> CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IDENTITIES OF EUROPE'S FUTURE	Aimed at building an effective dialogue between young people, education practitioners, civil society activists, community leaders and policymakers to facilitate a future of Europe based on more inclusive notions of cultural heritage and cultural identity.
<b>FOCUS</b> FORCED DISPLACEMENT & REFUGEE-HOST COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY	Focusses on how psychological and social factors influence dynamics of refugee integration with co-creative and participatory approaches to dynamic integration.
<b>MICADO</b> MIGRANT INTEGRATION COCKPITS AND DASHBOARDS	Aims at fostering exchange between migrants, public authorities and engaged civic society and easing migrants' access to regular social systems and counselling services through digital services.
<b>PERCEPTIONS</b> UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF NARRATIVES AND PERCEPTIONS OF EUROPE ON MIGRATION AND PROVIDING PRACTICES, TOOLS AND GUIDES FOR PRACTITIONERS	Researches perceptions and misperceptions of Europe and the EU by migrants and those intending to migrate: how they are formed, whether they correspond to reality and how they influence migration decisions.
<b>PROTECT</b> THE RIGHT TO INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION. A PENDULUM BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND NATIVIZATION?	Researches impacts of the UN's Global Compacts on refugees and migration promoting international cooperation and responsibility-sharing as key solutions to handle global refugee flows.
<b>SIRIUS</b> SKILLS AND INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM APPLICANTS IN EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKETS	Aimed at providing systematic evidence on post-2014 migrants, refugees and asylum applicants and their potential for labour market employment and social integration, as well as advancing knowledge on the complexity of labour market integration for post-2014 migrants, refugees, and asylum applicants, and to exploring their integration potential.
<b>SO-CLOSE</b> ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH SHARING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF FORCED MIGRATIONS	Aims at facilitating encounters between contemporary and past migration heritage stories through the mediation of innovative digital and artistic tools, working with a co-creational approach to cultural heritage making.
<b>TRACTION</b> OPERA CO-CREATION FOR A SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION	Aims at transforming communities at risk of exclusion with collaborative and participatory production workflow for the co-creation and co-design of art representations.
<b>MATILDE</b> MIGRATION IMPACT ASSESSMENT TO ENHANCE INTEGRATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPEAN RURAL AND MOUNTAIN AREAS	Researches how migration impacts local development and territorial cohesion in European rural and mountain regions, and how to improve integration and local development.
<b>WELCOMING SPACES</b> INVESTING IN 'WELCOMING SPACES' IN EUROPE: REVITALIZING SHRINKING AREAS BY HOSTING NON-EU MIGRANTS	Researches new ways to merge two policy challenges: How to contribute to the revitalisation of shrinking areas in the EU while also offering a welcoming space for non-EU migrants to pursue their life projects.

These projects bring together more than 200 researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from 34 countries, being 21 EU countries, representing a total of 135 institutions.



Event folder & participating projects. VDA design, Krakow.

### The main goals of the event

According to the organisers, the roundtable aimed at sharing the findings from ten EU Horizon2020 funded projects on the legal protection of refugees and migrants, on the (economic, cultural, political) impact of their presence on local, regional, or European constituencies, on innovative solutions to enhancing cohesion, and on the role of domestic agents. The roundtable gathered researchers, practitioners, journalists, and policymakers to discuss the potential of re-interpreting existing narratives, present good practices resulting from the ongoing projects, and inform political decision-making processes. Communicating the preliminary findings and advancing policy recommendations directly to EU officials and MEPs were the highlight of the event. All the interventions can be viewed at the following link: <https://inclusive-europe.com/livestream/>

### Speakers and Sessions

The roundtable started with the welcoming by Anamaria Dutceac Segesten from the University of Lund and the SO-CLOSE Project, which was the main organiser. Anamaria promptly pointed out that with the war in Ukraine our event had gained still more relevant momentum. However, we are better positioned to deal with these refugees and humanitarian crises, as we had the chance to learn from previous wars, especially the ones of Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

### European Commission (EC) present

The EC, through the participation of two high-level officials, made relevant informative interventions. Representing the EC Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, the Policy Officer Michalis

Moschovakos presented the state of play and future priorities of refugees and migrants at the EU level. The speaker mentioned that from 2014 to 2020, the Horizon2020 Programme financed over 40 projects on migration with an investment of around 100 million euros and 1000 researchers involved, which forms possibly the largest research community on migration in the world. This was mainly the EU Commission's response to the 2014 migration crisis, which resulted in research and partnership in 34 countries and covering topics such as migration governance, forced displacement, integration, climate change, discourses, narratives, modelling and forecasting.



EC Policy Officer Michalis Moschovakos. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

In 2021, Horizon Europe succeeded H2020 and it is compromised to continuing funding migration and mobility projects of public interest and political priorities to fill in knowledge gaps and pressing matters for policymakers across the EU, such as irregular migration, living conditions, the decision-making process of migrants and research on readmission policies. Mr Moschovakos pointed out that these topics of the 2021-22 call are still open for proposals until 20 April 2022. The future vision (2023-25) will receive projects with a focus on harvesting knowledge from previous H2020 projects to inform policymakers and translate this knowledge and investment into tangible policy results.

The afternoon session was opened by the representative of the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Policy Officer Luca Barani, who presented the EC Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 and the links with AMIF funding. Mr Barani justified the new action plan on integration and inclusion as part of the new comprehensive approach to migration and asylum, and to increase the support offered by the EC to migration stakeholders at all levels. Gender dimension for integration gained relevance in this new approach, and Education, Employment, Health and Housing are the sectoral priorities. The non-discriminatory access by migrants to policies is considered the building block of successful integration.

### **The war in Ukraine**

The second speaker in the morning was the Polish MEP Róża Thun. She opened her intervention by praising the diversity, stating that "civilisation makes progress where different people meet (...) and it does not make progress when just people alike meet". In this sense, the MEP lauded the painters, architects and craftsmen migrants from Italy (and also from the Czech Republic and The Netherlands) in the Renaissance and early modern times that made it possible for her hometown Kraków to become a cultural heritage of humanity. MEP Róża advised that what we have seen in the past years is only the beginning of waves of migration we will live in the future, and we are not prepared yet for this phenomenon. Further, referring to the recent case of migrants at the border of Belarus and Poland, she alerted that the Schengen borders shouldn't be a fortress or a place where migrants die, suffer from hunger, cold, and are tortured or beaten by guards, placed into detention centres, or still, places where walls are built. However, the present refugees from the Ukrainian war have received a different treatment to i.e. third-country students, especially African ones, who are not received in the EU. These

differences in care make the EU rethink its conception of human beings, and Poland to rethink its Christianity principles, asserted the MEP.

The conflict in Ukraine and its consequent refugee crisis gained more real contours in our event with a live intervention of Rafał Kostrzyński, the UN High Commission for Refugees' representative at the Ukraine-Poland border sharing the latest development regarding the refugee flow into Poland, which accounted for 100,000 per day.



MEP Róza Thun. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

The “selective compassion” for white, European and Christian refugees was brought up again in the Panel Discussion by Alagie Jinkang, from the University of Bologna, who related the difficulties African students were facing to get out of Ukraine and then to be received in Poland.

## Sessions

The morning continued with two parallel panels. The first was dedicated to *Economic, legal, and social factors and practices of inclusion*, moderated by Massoud Sharifi Dryaz from the Autonomous University of Barcelona and a member of the SO-CLOSE project. Coordinators or representatives of the following projects intervened in this panel: Focus, Matilde, Protect, Sirius and Welcoming Spaces. The second panel focused on *Fostering exchange and challenging narratives in cultural spaces*, moderated by Dominika Kasproicz, and it was composed of these projects: CHIEF, Traction, Micado, Perceptions and So-Close.



From left to right: Peter McDonagh, Jussi Laine, José Ricardo Martins and Simone Baglioni. Photo: Matteo Cogliati



From left to right: Massoud Sharifi Dryaz, Peter McDonagh, Jussi Laine, José Ricardo Martins and Simone Baglioni. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

Each speaker made a short introduction about his/her project, presented some findings and policy recommendations, as well as shared some insights of the fieldwork, practices that have been tested on the ground and policy-related results. Interestingly and fortunately, the most focus was given to filling the research-policy-practice gap. The on-site and the online audience took part in the debate that follow the panel.

As an illustration, here are some policy recommendations made by the speakers and the respective project:

- Persistent institutional barriers: duration of residence permits, language requirements for training/further education, language supports, family unification, recognition of qualifications (FOCUS).
- Language acquisition and access to training for economic and social inclusion (MATILDE).
- The requirements of implementation [of Global Compact recommendations] are vague, leaving states options of interpretation that can even counteract certain objectives (PROTECT).
- Civil society more central policy role to overcome societal barriers, and quicker access to work and training for asylum seekers to overcome legal/policy barriers (SIRIUS).
- Substitute randomised and quota system for a matching approach to improving the distribution and allocation of migrants, and envision a better communication strategy whereas the potential of migrants to be in the centre of a new winning narrative in the political discourse (WELCOMING SPACES).
- Create a commission/mechanisms for formal education providers through which gaps in curricula can be addressed, and appropriate anti-discrimination training can be provided if needed (CHIEF).
- Structural inequalities are reflected in the language barrier and digital divide (MICADO).
- Understand migration beyond binaries, solely rational interpretations; focus on less tangible imaginaries, technologies and emotions that reflect complex realities of migrant lives (PERCEPTIONS).
- Encouraging processes of truth acknowledgement and restorative justice; fostering decolonization processes on European memory, encouraging inclusive curricular study programs; taking actions towards a more shared system of policies for refugees and asylum seekers in all the EU countries (SO-CLOSE).
- Provide a bridge between opera professionals and specific communities at risk of exclusion to foster an effective community dialogue between diverse individuals and collectives (TRACTION).

## Migrants were present

The afternoon started with a successful migrant story: Obada Otabashi is a Syrian migrant, who after a few temptations, managed to arrive in Belgium in 2015 through a long journey. Given the difficulties in getting a job, he started his own restaurant and catering service: WeExist, [www.weexist.be](http://www.weexist.be), whose main goal is to provide job opportunities for Syrian refugees. His catering was the one which served us during the event. Obada told us about his determination to work, because "it is work that maintains us alive".



The Syrian migrant entrepreneur Obada Otabashi. On the back tv screen: Annelies Zoomers and Alagie Jinkang. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

Mr Abdoulaye Papalaye Seck of Top Manta, a union and cooperative of street vendors in Barcelona, Spain, was set up to support street vendor migrants against violence, mostly from the police, and to provide psychological, financial and basic needs support. Top Manta evolved to the designing, production and selling of clothes (mainly t-shirts) and sneakers (including an online shop).



The Top Manta union/association founder Abdoulaye Papalaye Seck. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

## The closing panel discussion

Representatives of all projects and MEPs were present in a hybrid panel to close our event. In-depth and pragmatic reflections were abundant in this panel. Here is summarized the intervention of two projects representatives only.

Annelies Zoomers of our Welcoming Spaces project opened the panel problematising the dichotomy between inclusive vs fortress Europe, and the duality dimension of policies: the internal aiming at integration, and the external at keeping migrants away, including payment to countries to keep migrants, with their lives at risk, on the other side of EU borders. Within this context, what is the role of solidarity?

Hakan Sicakkan of Protect project questioned the mixed message sent by the EU by having a solidarity discourse at the same time having its money spent to build barriers and walls and to keep migrants in dangerous situations away from its borders. He also brought up the double-edged argument to convincing the European population by the idea that migrants are needed in rural areas or useful in certain job sectors to be accepted by locals. How about when they are not needed anymore? Hakan, too, pledged for a more humanised and citizen right approach to migrants and less of a market-oriented logic.



From left to right: Anamaria Dutceac Segesten, Carla de Tona, Peter MacDonagh, Jussi Laine, Maria Mexi, Ainhua Flecha and Mikel Zorrila Berasategui. On the back tv screen: Annelies Zoomers, Hakan Sicakkan and Alagie Jinkang. Photo: Matteo Cogliati

## **In conclusion: we are making history**

The event was an opportunity to inform the European decision-makers, in an applicable, pragmatic way, about the findings and challenges of H2020 projects related to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approach of the projects made us learn from our colleagues and share our findings from a learning-community perspective, being able to overcome the traps of disciplinary silos and methodological fragmentations, and especially overcoming the binary categories, such as temporary/permanent, legal/illegal, forced/voluntary migration. Rather, the focus was placed on the complexity approach to migration, such as structure and agency, narratives, policies and governance.

It was history-making the fact that ten EU-financed projects focused on migration came together for the first time. This event aimed at offering an opportunity to engage with various researchers and practitioners from 34 countries including 21 EU countries, representing a total of 135 institutions. It was also an excellent occasion to establish a fruitful research network whereas we had the chance to meet each other and become acquainted with the work we all do on closely related topics. Certainly, the prospect of this initiative will lead us into future collaborations, preferably with the formation of a formal network. The seed has been sown.

Special thanks to Lili Nottrott and Anamaria Dutceac Segesten for the magnificent organisation and moderation of the event.



Photo: Matteo Cogliati