EVENT REPORT

A Dialogue on the Future of Europe

MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Online | 1 October | 11am-12:30pm

1. Event Summary

This event was the second in a series of five events organised by The Wheel with support from the European Commission Representation in Ireland. The aim of the series is to engage civil society, and by extension the communities they represent, with the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The topic of this particular event was Migrant Communities and it was delivered in collaboration with New Communities Partnership, an organisation that is working towards an intercultural and inclusive Irish society where immigrant groups are achieving equality in economic, social, political and cultural aspects of Irish life.

The event featured an introduction to the CoFoE with a demonstration of how to engage with the CoFoE's online platform and input from Sevak Khachatryan of New Communities Partnership on migrant communities and the EU. Facilitated breakout rooms allowed participants to discuss their key recommendations for the EU on overcoming challenges and creating opportunities in migrant communities. All ideas were collected by breakout room moderators and shared via the Mentimeter app in a plenary session. Sevak Khachatryan closed out the event with a summary of the recommendations and The Wheel encouraged participants to continue to engage with the Conference on the Future of Europe by registering on the digital platform and sharing their ideas about other topics of importance to them.

2. Participants

There were 33 participants comprised of people working with migrant communities on a professional basis, those living in migrant communities themselves, and citizens with a general interest in the topic.

3. Statement from The Wheel

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) is a year-long EU-wide project to seek citizens' views about Europe's future challenges and priorities on a variety of topics, including issues facing rural communities. The Wheel's goal with this event series is to facilitate Irish citizens and civil society playing a more participative role in shaping future developments across Europe and thereby influencing the decisions that directly affect them.

Through participation in EU initiatives like the Conference on the Future of Europe, civil society organisations can make their voices and the voices of their beneficiaries heard at EU level and have a chance to make real change. If it proves to be successful, the Conference's online platform might become a permanent public consultation tool – there's no time like the present to get familiar with it and do our part to make sure the future EU is an inclusive one.

4. Main topics and recommendations discussed during the workshops

The following ideas and recommendations were contributed by the participants in the breakout rooms and via the Mentimeter app.

- **Isolation, social inclusion & communities**
  - Spaces where people can come on a regular basis and feel safe
  - Opportunities to network - among migrants themselves and among those who work in the area
  - Don't send refugees to very rural parts of Ireland. Already low on services and with high levels of isolation.
  - Create a feeling of welcome: local councillors could send something small like letters, acknowledging them as part of communities
  - More relaxed meetings held to facilitate the building of feelings of togetherness, and to lessen the feelings of 'otherness'
  - Mental health/wellbeing assistance for migrants should be brought in across Europe. It should be mandatory across all countries. Lots of people are arriving into the country with mental issues having suffered trauma.
  - Safe space where people can come to chat. Medical practitioners are present if people want to avail of service.

- Differentiation/inequality of power between male/females in communities. Male members of communities are given more opportunity. Women are then more susceptible to issues like domestic violence or other issues of which they would be unable to communicate to services/medical services.
- Make sure people can find their ethnicity on surveys; makes you feel like you're welcome and like you belong here

- **Language barriers**
  - Adaption and good knowledge of the English language cannot be assumed., i.e. not everyone can adapt and learn languages easily.
  - The language provision act does not take families into consideration. There needs to be an integrated involvement in schools between parents & children.
  - A national plan to provide appropriate English language training to meet the needs of different migrant groups, ages and life experiences
  - Mandatory learning of language

- **Cultural awareness & new narratives**
  - Social inclusion projects that invite and acknowledge cultural differences
  - Enhance knowledge around cultural norms
  - Two-way integration needed
  - Acknowledge cultural differences – have festivals around different cultures to celebrate and showcase diversity and make people feel welcome and at home
  - Create programmes of education to address the issue of violence on the community
  - Need of a common definition for migrant so we have the same understanding of what population we're referring to
  - The narrative that the migrant is not going to add anything to the culture needs to change, we need to see it as an opportunity for new skills, a valuable member of society
  - Literacy in Ireland in how we know how to talk about ethnicity and migration
  - Cultural awareness education
  - Frank and open discussions on racism
  - The idea that "Irish" is a homogenous group and "Migrants" are a homogenous group adds to the feelings of them and us, and the binary nature of the situation. We need to hear and tell stories about the shared human experience.
  - Press need to play a positive role
  - New narrative needs to be created about communities due to growth in violence
  - Need to have a "leave no one behind" mentality, have to tell the story and tell the perspective of those who may not be included in the conversation

- **Integration & local support services**
  - Facilitate easier visa free freedom of movement
  - Minimum basic standard of living for migrants or refugees should be established (EU standardised approach)
  - More working together in the sector; better communication between support services
  - Virtual and networking opportunities for different advocacy groups to share learning and models of good practice

- There needs to be a "central hub" for all of the supports and services available (language, anti-racism). And the main organisations need to meet regularly (at least three times a year) to work together
- A survival pack for migrants: You arrive in a community and there is a community centre with your welcome pack/survival kit. It has everything to do with supports, education, services, local contacts, social inclusion activities, etc.
- There needs to be a clear path to social integration and inclusion within communities from the moment people arrive
- Department of Social affairs needs to put together list of requirements when entering country to speed up assimilation.
- Make sure they know about supports like New Communities Partnership and the Immigrant Council and that other supports exist
- Improved access to support services
- Address lack of job mobility
- Data: we need more data on who is here, where they are from, so we can design interventions
- Citizen's information, as a service should be supported and made more available. There needs to be more resources giving: more staff, more funding, better training of staff.
- Getting set up with PPSN number
- Healthcare access: no medical card because of legal status
- EU needs to make resources available. Create a template for each of the countries to act in a certain way. These actions have to be monitored by the EU to make sure each country is meeting the needs of the migrants and empowering them.
- EU needs to step in on direct provision. At the very least, enforce the rules set at state level (24 months max. some people are in there for 8 years)
- Service providers need to be more culturally sensitive: there is an assumption that migrants will understand information communicated to them by an Irish person
- Information provision needs to be culturally and linguistically tailored
- Community groups/citizens advice groups are key to providing supports, especially for parents and children
- Migrant community groups need greater support
- Develop a "Cultural Mediator" system to allow migrants better access to services
  - Migrants helping other migrants access systems
  - Have role in different departments or organisations to facilitate better communication and processes
  - Contribute to migrant communities having greater trust in service providers

- **Education, (quality) employment & ownership**
  - Place people of migrant background in the chair, in the centre of the discussion on how we define and describe ethnicity, identity, racism, whiteness, communities
  - Development of a forum among migrant leaders to identify challenges and to produce a report as to how this can be addressed.
  - Process of employment for migrants is too expensive, it needs to be quicker, more support in the beginning and longer term
  - Faster processing of professional qualifications; improve recognition of qualifications

- o Standardize acknowledgement of qualifications across Europe
- o Good quality employment which matches migrants' qualifications and experiences
- o More work with businesses to help them recruit and support migrant employees.
- o Better awareness and education of employers to remove the stigmas they have associated with migrant workers
- o Wave non-EU fees for third level for migrants so they can participate in education on par with EU citizens
- o For universities, we need to see actual diversity of Irish society reflected in third level education. To do that, all sectors need to work together.

- **EU funding opportunities**
  - o Funding/Services measurement should focus more on qualitative research as opposed to quantitative
  - o Funding for network of services with specific strategic objective based on research and a community development approach to address the needs of migrants and new communities to share ideas, advocate on behalf and work to empower individuals and groups
  - o How funding is allocated makes organisations compete rather than co-operate. The EU has a role in ensuring funding is used to provide good quality supports throughout countries which are centred on the needs of migrants.
  - o More joined up thinking in relation to funding; a call for organisations to pool resources

5. Follow-up

This report was created based on the ideas and recommendations shared by the participants in the breakout rooms and jointly collected during the event. This report will be uploaded and shared on the CoFoE online platform and sent to all participants to encourage them to continue to contribute their ideas to the platform.