



PRESS RELEASE

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Listen to civil society's views on a future EU Integration Agenda!

On the occasion of the EU Integration Forum's meeting on 24 and 25 June in Brussels, the European Network against Racism (ENAR) calls on EU policy makers to take civil society's views seriously into account when devising the next European Agenda for Integration. This meeting is indeed a key opportunity of civil society and migrants' organisations to participate in the policy debate, but they must be listened to and not just "consulted" - tick the box, and move to something else. If ongoing dialogue with civil society is crucial to the good functioning of democratic societies, the topic of integration is definitely one where taking into account all stakeholders' perspectives is most decisive.

ENAR firmly considers that a number of principles must be an integral part of a more extensive EU integration strategy. First, it is crucial to change the current negative discourse on migration into a positive one, promoting the benefits of diversity. Ethnic and religious minorities living in Europe are bridges between societies and should be recognised as rich contributors to majority societies, economically, socially as well as culturally - from the Polish plumber in London to the Lebanese restaurant owner in Tallinn.

Integration must also be seen as a two-way process, engaging both migrants/ethnic & religious minorities and the host/majority society. While this is clearly stipulated in the EU's Common Basic Principles on Integration, adopted by EU member states in 2004, in practice most member states have focused on the obligations of migrants and not on those of the majority society. *Mutual* integration is essential with change required from both sides. Society needs to change as do migrants, in the framework of human rights principles, in order to collectively shape a richer, stronger and more cohesive society, harnessing all talents with no one left lagging behind.

In addition, the current debate on integration has to date not been adequately linked with broader policies on social inclusion and anti-discrimination. For instance, laws introducing integration tests as well as 'loyalty oaths' in some countries infringe on the right to family life and/or are discriminatory. Such 'integration' tests run counter to their stated aim of promoting integration. The EU and its member states must recognise that anti-discrimination and social inclusion are prerequisites for successful integration strategies.

ENAR President Mohammed Aziz said: "It is time EU integration policies take the migrants' voice into account, and we are happy the EU Integration Forum can act as a channel for this voice. It is now urgent that EU policy makers actually listen to this voice and adopt a new EU Integration Agenda that really addresses barriers to integration for migrants and ethnic minorities."

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) is a network of NGOs working to combat racism in all EU member states and represents more than 600 NGOs spread around the European Union. ENAR aims to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals, and to link local/regional/national and European initiatives.

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