

Statement by the European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration (EPAM)¹ on the future EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Forum

16 September 2014

The extension of the scope of the current European Integration Forum to cover topics related to immigration and asylum presents an opportunity to revise the format of the Forum in order to make it a more constructive, efficient and visible meeting space between civil society organizations and EU and Member States high-level policy makers. The new European Asylum, Migration and Integration Forum (hereinafter AMI Forum) must involve a broader civil society membership as the issues it will address are more diverse and more related to EU law and thus engage the European Commission's obligations as guardian of the treaties. The new Forum should not replace ongoing consultation and monitoring mechanisms, but enhance their effectiveness.

With this statement, EPAM would like to propose revisions that should be made to the Forum in order to make it a more representative and more efficient entity. These changes can be regrouped in three main categories: structural changes, changes in the agenda-setting procedures and changes in participation procedures. The Forum should aim at wider representation to allow for a high-level dialogue on asylum, migration and integration issues in the EU between civil society organisations and Member States and EU policymakers. The participation of immigrant-run organisations should also be facilitated.

Key propositions

1. **Structural changes: the AMI Forum should be more inclusive and promote collaboration between civil society and EU organisations to agree on the topic, agenda and participants.**
 - a. The AMI Forum should be mainly structured around civil society-led roundtables discussions on various aspects of the issue(s) being addressed during the Forum. The plenary sessions should not constitute the main focus of the Forum and thus should be limited in duration allowing for Q&A for all speakers at the end. The final part of the Forum should be a 'common space' for debate, focused on the conclusions and recommendations adopted during the main part of the Forum. During this final part, MEPs and Member State policymakers who are in favor or against certain measures should be invited to defend their positions and the representative of the European Commission and relevant EP committee(s) should present how they plan to follow-up on the conclusions and recommendations adopted during the Forum in the following year. The written contributions, recommendations, and transcripts of all

¹ The European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration (EPAM) is a group of European non-governmental organisations and networks seeking to contribute to the development of asylum, refugee and migration policy in the European Union. The Platform was created in 1994 at the initiative of UNHCR. Meeting regularly to share information and to coordinate advocacy strategies, the group is politically neutral and independent.

speeches will be published by EC, EESC, and EPAM through all of their information channels.

- b. In order to guarantee visibility and relevant participation, the Forum should be scheduled to coincide with meetings of high-level Member States policymakers. The main part of the Forum should be open to invited EU and national civil society organisations as full participants as well as to a few independent experts as observers. Finally, as a way to facilitate constructive and in-depth debate, participants should be allowed to discuss and endorse a set of recommendations that they have prepared in advance of the Forum.

2. Changes in agenda-setting procedures: the AMI Forum agenda-setting process should be revised to allow a more structural and timely input to the formulation of EU policy and enforcement.

- a. As the Forum will now address not only issues of integration but also of asylum and migration, equal amounts of time should be dedicated to these three areas of EU policy and specific issues with asylum, migration and integration-related aspects should be selected. While the Forum may choose to focus a meeting on one or two areas, the following meeting should in that case address an issue related to the other area(s). The issues addressed in the AMI Forum must be directly linked to the major ongoing policy processes at EU level or to major policy trend across the Member States.
- b. The focus of the Forum meeting should be agreed upon through consultation with EU NGOs through EPAM and other platforms when relevant. EPAM's contribution to the post-Stockholm agenda already provides a clear guiding reference with 15 commonly agreed priorities for future EU policy development. The issues to be addressed during a meeting should be chosen and published in advance (e.g. 6 months to 1 year) by the EC, EESC and EPAN through their information channels in order to allow for participants to prepare constructive input.
- c. The bureau of the AMI Forum must adopt a statute – to be agreed upon by all bureau members - that will regulate agenda-setting, participation selection and operational procedures. The statute should also guarantee an equal and active role for NGOs as bureau members. With regards to the consultation process for the setting of the agenda, the bureau should be careful to allocate enough time to carry out a thorough consultation with civil society organisations, including immigrant-run organisations and should also consider to develop more institutional cooperation with the relevant committees of the European Parliament in setting the agenda for the forum.

3. Changes in participation procedures: wider participation civil society and EU and Member States high-level policy makers should be promoted in order to transform the AMI Forum into a more visible and constructive meeting space.

- a. EU-level civil organisations working on asylum, migration and integration should be able to go through a standard application procedure and upon approval by the bureau they will send their most expert representative on the issue addressed in each forum meeting.
- b. National civil society organisations will participate on the basis of an open call that will take place for each forum meeting. National organisations as well as Member States' relevant official consultative and advisory bodies will be invited to submit a short written contribution answering a short list of questions prepared by the EC in consultation with the bureau. Two-to-three respondents per Member State will be selected by the bureau, in consultation with EU NGOs, on the basis of the quality and relevance of their written contribution, always ensuring a broad representation of grassroots expertise and experience relevant for the given EU issues. During this selection process, priority should be given among the high-quality respondents to immigrant-run organisations who will also be the preferred recipients of any available funding for the preparation of their written or oral contributions. If quality contributions are insufficient for a given Member State, free spaces will be reallocated to the highest quality respondents from other Members States, preferably from the same geographic region.
- c. Independent agencies, experts and legal practitioners can apply ad hoc to attend a specific forum based on their proven EU-wide/comparative expertise on the given EU issue.
- d. After the forum, participants should be obliged to report on the proceedings and statements of the forum to other organisations at national level, including immigrant-run organisations.

NGO Platform Members

- **Amnesty International** European Institutions Office (AI-EIO): www.amnesty.eu
- **Association Européenne pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (AEDH)**: www.aedh.eu
- **Caritas Europa**: www.caritas-europa.org
- **Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)**: www.ccme.be
- **COFACE Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU**: www.coface-eu.org
- **EKD (Protestant Church in Germany)** office Brussels as member of CCME: www.ekd-bruessel.de
- **European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)**: www.ecre.org
- **European Network Against Racism (ENAR)**: www.enar-eu.org
- **European Network of Migrant Women**: www.migrantwomennetwork.org
- **European Women's Lobby**: www.womenlobby.org
- **European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)**: www.feantsa.org
- **European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe)**: www.ilga-europe.org
- **International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)**: www.icmc.net
- **International Detention Coalition (IDC)**: www.idcoalition.org
- **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**: www.fidh.org
- **International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)**: www.irct.org
- **International Rescue Committee (IRC)**: www.rescue.org
- **Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Europe**: www.jrseurope.org
- **Justice et Paix Francophone de Belgique**: www.justicepaix.be
- **Médecins du Monde (Mdm)**: www.medecinsdumonde.org
- **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)**: www.msf.org (as an observer)
- **Migration Policy Group (MPG)**: www.migpolgroup.com
- **Pax Christi International**: www.paxchristi.net
- **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)**: www.picum.org
- **Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)**: www.qcea.org
- **Save the Children**: www.savethechildren.net/brussels
- **Solidar**: www.solidar.org