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Dutch Diversity Dialogue Forum

“The value of migrants for the labour market and the Dutch economy”

On 15th June 2021, HOGIAF organised its online Diversity Dialogue Forum (DDF), in the framework of the MAX Project, with the aim of showing the added value of migrants in the Dutch labour market and general economy. The goals were to bring together locals, migrants and organisations involved in integration to work to overcome stereotypes and misconceptions about the contribution of migrants to EU society.

To shed light on this subject from different angles, we invited a recent migrant (Burhan Kocabiyik), someone who supports migrant integration (Oscar van der Ende) and a member of the Dutch Parliament (Mustafa Amhaouch).

The meeting was kicked off by the Dutch representative of the Max Project, Suayip Zeyrek (HOGIAF). He spoke about what the Max Project is and gave an overview of the outcomes of the Dutch report on public opinion on migration and the needs of migrants in the Netherlands. The main outcomes presented were:

- The Netherlands received many refugees during the 2015 refugee crisis;
- The Netherlands is historically a tolerant country towards migrants;
- The perception of the population on receiving migrants is changing. Dutch citizens are very divided in their opinions, although the majority support and welcome migrants;
- There are many initiatives to improve the cultural image of migrants and their integration in society.

Suayip Zeyrek spoke about the needs of migrants in order to identify how to better help them to navigate the integration process:

- The education system needs to focus on better education for refugee and migrant children;
- There is a need to create employment opportunities for refugees and migrants;
- The media need to be used as a platform for spreading positive and real information about migrants.

The event was moderated by Murk Muller, lawyer and board member of HOGIAF. The moderator asked the speakers about their experiences, the labour market, and their value to the Dutch society. Besides the pre-scripted questions, attendees had the opportunity to ask additional questions to the speakers during the event.

After the introduction, Murk Muller asked Oscar van der Ende from *Build Your Own Future* about his business and experiences in helping migrants to develop their business idea in the Netherlands. In the last 4 years he has helped 120 refugees to find jobs or internships or to create their own businesses. His motivation is grounded in his belief that every person deserves to live a wealthy life. He states that every person has unique qualities that add value to our society. They can be a part of the solution to the aging population issue and the shortage of workers. Oscar van der Ende pointed out that to make this happen, we need to educate and support them. The greatest difficulties migrants face are learning the language, bureaucracy and a government that is afraid of refugees.

Oscar van der Ende's experience with refugees is that they want to be independent. Most refugees don't feel comfortable relying on the government, but many steps need to be taken to get approval for their asylum. This results in a wait of 2 or 3 years, during which they are unable to develop themselves. His final advice for newcomers is learn the language, speak with people from outside your community and try to understand Dutch society.

“Get out of your comfort zone.”

The next speaker was Burhan Kocabiyik. He is a refugee who came to the Netherlands 5 years ago. He currently owns a successful Augmented Reality business and wants to share his own experiences with newcomers. Burhan mentioned first how important it is to learn the language and that the best way to do so is to get out of your comfort zone. Another piece of advice he gives is to have a positive mindset, because it can be hard to realise that your previous goals don't match your new situation.

The difficulties he faced as a start-up entrepreneur were lack of experience and financial resources. He couldn't find any bank to help him with liquidity. According to him, his business adds value to the Dutch labour market and economy. He creates new job opportunities, works with local people, and has international clients.

Burhan Kocabiyik admitted that it is a challenge to get started but does advise newcomers to try to succeed. He strongly believes that language is key and that setting goals and thinking positive will help every intending entrepreneur to succeed.

“We need to get the most out of every person.”

The last speaker was Mustafa Amhaouch, a member of the Dutch Parliament with responsibility for Economic Affairs. One of his main goals is to highlight the importance of talent development. We need to get the most out of every person.

Mustafa Amhaouch sees positive trends in several migrant communities to build their own businesses. As a politician he tries to stimulate this by improving financing for migrant entrepreneurs. A huge challenge in those communities can be found in the lack of interaction between them. He thinks that for a business to succeed, it is necessary to embrace diversity, to interact outside of your community and to inspire each other. The same advice is also given to all Dutch companies. Mustafa Amhaouch points out that although many companies in the Netherlands already tried to differentiate their staff, many developments can still be made. He thus claims that Dutch society and companies should look to the value of diversity and advocate diversity in our labour market for our future generations.

Mustafa Amhaouch also explained that, at this moment, the debate about refugees and migrants in the Netherlands is very heated. There are two sides in this debate that are thinking completely different things about this matter. He thinks it is about time that the Dutch Parliament had a serious debate about this, without heated arguments. Afterwards, the Parliament could be able to build constructive policies to manage the situation.

At the end he stated that the migrant issue has two sides, which should both be appreciated. On the one hand, migrants need help from our society. On the other hand, migrants add a massive value to our society. They are part of the solution to our labour shortage, they add value to GDP and they bring their experiences and talents with them.

The main conclusions of the event and discussion were:

- There are many challenges for newcomers, with which support is needed from the government and local initiatives;
- Migrants and refugees are a major part of the solution for the Dutch labour market shortage;
- Migrants and refugees add more diversity to Dutch society which is prioritising and celebrating diversity;
- Dutch society can profit from the talents, experiences and qualities of migrants and refugees.

The MAX project is funded by the AMIF programme of the European Union and that aims to improve the public image of migrants in Europe by changing the narrative around the immigration discourse and showcasing the stories of real people.



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