

Notes from the EMN Cluster Meeting in Oslo, 2 June 2016

Anne Siri Rustad, Head of UDI's International Section **welcomed** the participants¹, stressing the advantage of having contacts through the EMN NCPs when searching for new ideas, discussions, initiatives and experiences. She looked forward to learning from the meeting about how to establish and maintain national networks, and their memberships. One important question is whether and how such networks can help those concerned with and knowledgeable about migration and asylum issues to reach policy makers with relevant information, and for them to make use of the networks when making proposals for new policies.

First session: building, maintaining and developing national networks.

In her introduction to the discussion in this session **Dobromira Tjessem** (NO EMN NCP) referred to the typology of EMN networks presented in the latest report evaluating EMN: (i) networks with just a core membership: only consisting of a select membership; (ii) networks with an open 'membership, essentially consisting of a fluid list of contacts interested in issues related to migration and asylum; and (iii) networks that consists of a combination of (i) and (ii).

While the type and 'membership' of a network depends on many factors, including the size of the country and the 'structure' of the migration/asylum community, the 'core of the network' typically consists of the authorities with responsibility for (various aspects of) the formulation and implementation of migration and asylum policies, while the 'open membership' would consist of representatives of public institutions, NGOs (civil society bodies), lawyers, researchers and consultants with an active interest in international migration and asylum, as well as journalists and others involved with immigrants and refugees and concerned with their situation.

One NCP mentioned that it maintains good relationships with researchers by inviting them to discuss topical issues, thus creating a meeting place where e.g. proposals for EMN studies can be presented. It makes certain to inform the researchers about EMN studies, and this has been starting points for further research: e.g. on 'new forms of mobility'. The same NCP reported that its monthly electronic newsletter is distributed to about 800 addresses to central and local government officials, and that its web-page is being used to identify relevant experts. The current activities have resulted from a two-year process where the current coordinator for this NCP had visited relevant authorities, researchers and NGOs to map their needs for information about migration and asylum, as well as the possibilities for cooperation.

Several participants mentioned their annual national conference as a main event which also serves to renew/update the network membership, and activate the members. Several NCPs have an electronic Newsletter which they distribute regularly to the network members, and which presents national developments and reports, EMN reports and key developments reported by other NCPs. Other NCPs keep a national web-site updated with EMN-related and

¹ Annex 1 is a list of participants.

relevant information.² It was stressed that to recruit, engage and retain network members it was necessary to map and reflect their interests. It is necessary to be pro-active and have a budget and strategy for maintaining and expanding the network.

It was **concluded** that

- the EMN Handbook should develop further the guidance on how to establish, manage and maintain a national EMN network, and how this network may effectively cooperate with networks established for researchers and others working in the field of migration and asylum, and
- how to establish, develop and nurture a national EMN network warrants a broader discussion and exchange of experiences among the EMN NCPs, e.g. at a special meeting connected to a regular EMN NCP meeting.

Second session: the influence of media commentary and its effect on immigration policy in the context of recent developments.

In her introduction to the discussion in this session **Ingeborg Grimsmo** (UDI's director of communications) first described how UDI's staff interacted with the R&D project "Mediation of migration".³ The message from that project was that UDI worked very well with the media, providing good service and managing to convey constructive messages. This was in many respects confirmed during the 'crisis' in the second half of 2015 when the number of asylum seekers to Norway surged, resulting in a tripling of the total number from 2014, with special media focus on the more than 5 000 asylum seekers who came across from Russia at Storskog in the far north. As a consequence of having built good relationships with the media over a long period of time, the media accepted that UDI did face difficulties and did its best to find solutions in this sudden and difficult situation. UDI was trusted to be consistent and open in its communications to the media, and the clear division of labour between UDI (operational challenges) and the Ministry (political challenges) was recognized and *respected*. The UDI DG was used as a spokesperson, both at regular briefings and in *ad hoc* ones, unlike in more regular situations when the UDI spokespersons are closer to the operational issues. UDI has also made use of thematic 'breakfast meetings' to inform the public and NGO representatives about topical issues and to build respect and confidence in UDI's professionalism. The need for UDI to take information initiatives was stressed, to prevent the media to set the agenda.

The discussion revealed that the interaction with media differs between the agencies hosting the NCPs, reflecting different national contexts and settings. Most, but not all agencies, make use of named media contact persons and spoke persons when presenting news or providing comments.

² Depending on the communication priorities of the host organisation, these web-sites are not always easy to find. Often the best approach is to use search engines to search for e.g. EMN 'country name'.

³ <http://www.hf.uio.no/imk/english/research/projects/mom/>

It was underlined that to be publicized results of EMN studies or *ad hoc* queries to the media have to be 'tailored' to how the media present issues and what it is that they consider as 'news', without distorting realities. The challenge is to understand how and with what type of message the different media think that they can catch their audience's attention. It is also important to remember that this differs between countries, and that the various EMN products must be modified to fit the national media, as must the EMN's communication strategy or 'tool box' when applied in a national context.

It was observed that it has happened that the synthesis reports from EMN studies have not been able to present results in a meaningful way. There is also a need to develop better specifications for the requested statistics, to make them reasonably comparable. This was stressed as a challenge for the Statistics Working Group in particular. Clearly, cross-national comparisons are of interest in many countries. One NCP reported that they had worked with a media company in order to present facts and figures effectively.