

**Professor Andrew Geddes**

**Remarks at the launch event of the E-MINDFUL project**

**Tuesday 15 June 2021**

It is a pleasure and an honour to be with you this morning to represent the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute in Florence Italy. We are delighted to be part of the E-MINDFUL project.

In these remarks I will tell you a little bit more about the Migration Policy Centre and the European University Institute. I will also explain why we are so happy to participate in this project along with such a fantastic range of partners. We look forward very much to the collaboration, the work that will be done and to learning more from our partners about your perspectives on the important issues that will be addressed by the E-MINDFUL project.

The European University Institute is based in the small town of San Domenico di Fiesole in the hills just outside of the city of Florence. It was founded in 1972 by member states of the European Union as an institution focused on postgraduate and postdoctoral education. The EUI is a specialist social science and humanities institution with four academic departments: Law, History, Economics and Social & Political Sciences. I would like to make it very clear that we are an independent academic institution and are not an EU institution. I think it's very important to make that very clear for those who are not familiar with the European University Institute.

Since its foundation, the EUI has expanded beyond the four academic departments to also include the Robert Schumann Centre for Advanced Studies and also, since 2018, the School of Transnational Governance. This means that the EUI still has a focus on education and training at postgraduate and post doc level, plus advanced research and the promotion of policy dialogue.

The Migration Policy Centre Account was founded in 2012, although there had been a strong focus on migration research at EUI before then. The MPC has as its focus the transnational governance of international migration and mobility. We conduct research, offer training and also seek to promote policy dialogue.

The MPC's research focuses on a number of key themes. These include the governance of migration of mobility; the relationship between migration labour markets welfare states and social rights; migration and development; the relationship between research and policy-making; migration, borders, security and smuggling.

In addition to this and of direct relevance to the E-MINDFUL project, the MPC has also developed significant expertise in the study of attitudes to migration. I will now explain to you a bit more about the work that we have done on attitudes to migration.

In 2017, when I was appointed as Director of the Migration Policy Centre, the Observatory of Public Attitudes to Migration was established to provide data, evidence and expertise about attitudes to migration. We now have a team of researchers working on these issues. We will also tell you more about some of our work in later session as well.

The Observatory was for established three main reasons.

First, while there has been a much greater focus on gathering information data and evidence about international migration, there have not been systematic efforts to gather information data and evidence about attitudes to migration.

Second, the provision of data, evidence and information about the drivers of and structure of attitudes to migration is necessary because it can better inform decision-making about migration.

A third and final reason why OPAM was established was that efforts to communicate more effectively about the causes and effects of migration will be enhanced by an understanding of the factors that can drive or even change attitudes to migration.

I would like to emphasise some key insights that our OPAM project has already provided:

- There has been a tendency to assume that attitudes to migration in Europe as becoming more negative. Our research would suggest that across the EU, attitudes to migration have become consistently more favourable over the last twenty years or so. This is a finding that surprises some people, but is very strongly evident.

- Our research also shows that attitudes to migration are quite stable and resistant to change. This is because attitudes to migration are formed in the same way as attitudes to other social and political issues. By this is meant that they are formed early in life and powerful influenced by early life experiences, particularly of education. Once formed they can be resistant to change.
- Our research has also shown that there has been significant variation in the attention paid to migration issues. The term that is used to describe this is issue salience. We have been able to show how issue salience increased significantly after the so-called migration crisis of 2015 and that this has important effect on politics in many European countries and at EU level.

We are very happy to be part of the E-MINDFUL project because of the potential to develop new perspectives informed by original data and evidence. The E-MINDFUL project is very timely, highly relevant to policy debates and has the potential to offer significant and important insights that will shape decision-making.

This brings me to the MPC's engagement with the E-MINDFUL project. As I said earlier, we are delighted to be able to cooperate in this exciting project and look forward very much to the work that will be done in the next months and years.

Our role will be to help design, implement and analyse surveys which will enable the project to understand more about the effects of information campaigns on attitudes to migration in the countries that will be participating in this project. Our OPAM team has extensive experience in the design and implementation of surveys and in the analytical techniques that are necessary to make sense of complex survey data.

I would like to conclude by also making a couple of additional points which I think very much relate to our engagement with this project.

First, we see our role in this project has been to understand more about the drivers and structure of attitudes. Our intention is to gather new material which helps us make sense of these attitudes. We do not see our role as being to change peoples' attitudes to migration. There are very good

scientific reasons to see this as unlikely, undesirable and also potentially counterproductive. There is extensive research that shows that attitudes to migration are quite deeply rooted in peoples' values and beliefs systems and are likely to be resistant to change. We would strongly agree with the rationale informing the E-MINDFUL project, which is that communication about migration is likely to be more effective if it resonates with peoples' values and attitudes as they are.

A second point I would like to make is about our role as an academic institution. At the MPC and through our open project our idea is to make available the best possible data and evidence to support decision-making. Our focus is on trying to ensure the highest standards of scientific rigour in all the aspects of the work that we do so that we can properly support the project, its ambitions and all our colleagues with whom we will work on the E-MINDFUL project.

I will conclude on that point. Thank you all for your attention. I look forward to the other contributions that will be made to this launch event and of course to engage with the E-MINDFUL project in the months and years to come.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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