# ETUC for Growth and Social Progress: Priorities for the Annual Growth Survey 2017

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The following paper outlines the policy priorities for working people in the 2017 Annual Growth Survey (AGS). At the heart of these is the pressing need to challenge the inequality that represents a great threat to social cohesion both within Member States and across Europe. Much of this has been exacerbated by structural reforms. Below are outlined the main challenges confronting workers with a series of policy priorities to address them. However, within these, we can categorise most under four main headline priorities which are essential to providing the boost that Europe needs:

*Investment for quality jobs*: taking the necessary steps to free up public investment via a revision of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) as well as stimulating private investment. The ETUC demands the implementation of our investment plan, including a commitment to investment of 2% of GDP per year for the next 10 years, to generate quality jobs and develop sustainable energy systems, meeting social, economic and environmental challenges.

*A commitment to high-quality employment*: a political commitment to tackling and monitoring the scourge of precarious work in Europe. A commitment to quality employment should encompass decent wages, dealing with non-standard forms of employment, adequate working time and work-life balance, good working conditions and job security, access to lifelong learning and career development and collective interest representation. This commitment is crucial in the framework of the future of work.

*A Pay Rise delivered through collective bargaining*: upward wage convergence is a necessity in order to improve the purchasing power of workers' and boost internal demand. Collective bargaining is the most efficient, effective and equitable way of delivering this investment in the workers of Europe. There must be an end to a 'cheap labour' model in Europe.

*Pensions and adequate social protection*: our systems must ensure a high level of protection both avoiding the decline of income when social risks emerge and social exclusion and poverty.

## Macroeconomic challenges

The Annual Growth Survey for 2017 should be directed towards key economic policies: investment (public and private) and a Pay Rise to fight economic inequality. These will work together to boost aggregate demand, decrease inequality and therefore stimulate a lagging economy. At European and national levels policies should be designed in order to deliver full employment, to firmly tackle economic inequality and make sure that quality jobs are still the main instrument to deliver decent living standards for all.

The disastrous experience of austerity, of cutting public expenditure when the recovery is still fragile and weak, should never be repeated. The ETUC wants a demand-side policy that is firmly countercyclical.

It is clear that the lack of domestic demand (comprising consumption, public and private investment, government expenditure) is a major challenge at the European level. The export-led strategy which has been pursued since 2011 is unsustainable due to the deteriorating economic outlook in many emerging markets. The performance of exports has not translated into a boost to activity in Europe as it was not accompanied by commitments to increased investment and adequate quality employment. This means that external demand has declined via exports at the same time as internal demand has via consumption. This is unsustainable and therefore requires strong intervention to boost public investment and wages.

There are further worrying indicators as GDP growth rates for the EU (0.4%) and the Eurozone (0.3%) for the second quarter of the year are lower than those registered in the first quarter. Inflation is dangerously low, having increased to 0.2%. The monthly inflation rate for July 2016 reached -0.6% for the Eurozone and -0.4% across the EU. These figures increase slightly if energy prices are excluded, reaching -0.5% in the Eurozone. While such rates could be considered as positive in the short term, supporting household disposable income, in the long term such negative rates are detrimental to private investment (as projects are postponed) and to wages.

Private investment trends are also below expectations. Private investment as a percentage of GDP increased slightly in 2015 compared to 2014, from 11.71% to 11.99% in the whole EU, and a little more, from 11.74% to 12.3%, in the Eurozone. The Juncker plan was launched eighteen months ago but the few studies analysing its development raise a number of important issues. Most of the investments approved could have been in fact financed by the EIB alone, given the risk profiles of the selected projects. Equally important is the fact that these investments are geographically concentrated, reinforcing European imbalances. The ETUC therefore welcomes the doubling of the Juncker plan to 630 billion euros of investment in Europe but we want to see the issues raised above, around crowding out pre-planned investment and addressing imbalances between Member States, addressed. Finally, the ETUC raises concerns regarding the use of public money within public-private partnership frameworks.

Public investment is also way short of where it needs to be, stagnating as a proportion of GDP at the level of 2014 across the EU, including the Eurozone. (Prior to this, there has been a continuous decline from 2009.) In monetary terms, public investment levels remain lower than before the 2007-2008 crisis. The ETUC therefore reiterates its call for a European investment plan with the target of investing an additional 2% of EU GDP per year over a 10-year period.

The ETUC stresses the need for an expansionary fiscal policy. The fiscal stance is expected to provide a small positive contribution to demand in 2016 and to turn broadly neutral in 2017 and 2018. However, as stated by the European Central Bank (ECB), the expansionary fiscal stance in 2016 stems mainly from cuts in direct taxes and social security contributions in several countries and higher expenditures relating to the inflow of refugees. However, the fiscal stance must be designed to increase public investment.

On the balance of payments, the EU's 12-month cumulative current account for the period ending in June 2016 recorded a surplus of 147.7 billion euros. However, this was only achieved because imports decreased at a faster pace than exports (because of the above-mentioned slowdown in economic growth in emerging markets) both for the EU and EMU. In addition, both intra-Eurozone and intra-EU trade fell in the last year – demonstrating the danger of an erroneous export-led growth model. Moreover, intra-European imbalances did not disappear.

The ETUC recalls its opposition to the establishment of national Productivity Boards and raises concerns on how they will be used in the context of the European Semester. Moreover, the focus on so-called 'independent experts' excludes workers' and their elected representatives.

Monetary policy must continue to ensure low or even negative interest rates for Member States to be able to invest. This scheme, which is an effective debt relief mechanism as Member States will pay interest to the European System of Central Banks which will ultimately be refunded to Member States, must be extended to Greece. However, debt relief to Member States must be conditional on the financing of the private sector by commercial banks. We are strongly concerned with the burden of public debt when we see countries like Portugal, where public investment is less than half of what is paid in interests. This is unsustainable.

The SGP and consequently the Fiscal Compact is opposed by the ETUC. Economic governance procedures should be revised in order to increase public investment, to fund infrastructure and research, as well as universal and high-quality education, healthcare and social services. The ETUC is outraged at the prospect of fines for Spain and Portugal in this regard, as well as the lingering threat of the suspension of access to of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs). Fines and funding removal cannot be a principled response to Member States in financial difficulties. However, new investment schemes for mobilising public money for European investment will be necessary to counter symmetric and asymmetric shock in Europe.

Finally, as workers have paid the highest price in the crisis, fiscal justice and economic reason demand a strengthening of the fight against tax avoidance and tax havens for collecting revenue. This necessitates the publication of detailed country-by-country reports from multinational companies in order to collect tax revenues where profits are made. Current proposals are insufficient in this respect.

*Policy priorities*

The challenges outlined can and must be addressed by a commitment to increasing public investment and allowing for a Pay Rise. There are specific policy adjustments that would help in this regard.

Firstly, the SGP should be revised to allow Member States confronting difficulties to raise their deficit above the 3% limit. This would be in order to increase public investment, to fund infrastructure and research, a just transition to a green economy, as well as universal and high-quality education, healthcare and social services. When such investments yield longer-term growth, their compensation within a four-year horizon of their respective Stability or Convergence Programme should be extended. The flexibility permitted to Member States under the preventive arm of the Pact should also be accessible to Member States under the corrective arm.

Secondly, in order to boost public investment by lowering sovereign interest rates, the ECB must continue and strengthen its bond-buying programme to all Member States. On Quantitative Easing (QE), there needs to be firm action to boost lending and get the real economy moving. Commercial banks receiving liquidities from the QE programmes must be conditional on increasing investment in real, socially and environmentally responsible organisations for quality job-creation.

## Creating fair labour market(s)

The ETUC welcomes the modest improvements in the employment rate that have been experienced across Europe in the last year but there remains a long way to go. Rectifying the widespread destruction wrought by policy responses to the crises of recent years, and labour market reforms in particular, will take sustained and concerted efforts. Furthermore, these modest improvements that we observe in general are by no means spread evenly, and present worrying divergences in labour market performance both within and between Member States.

We are concerned about the quality of the jobs that have been created as too many are short-term, precarious or of very low quality. Structural labour market reforms, decreases in the protection of workers and a lack of real protection in case of dismissals have failed to create more jobs while driving inequality. The 2017 European Semester cycle, and Country-Specific Recommendations in particular, should therefore seek to re-establish security in employment by providing pro-active protection, including in case of dismissals.

### *Employment challenges*

Key challenges persist over the long term across Member States in relation to dysfunctional labour markets which lead to widespread precarious work (as well as the driving down of employment quality in the highly-sought 'standard' employment contracts). This means that in many individual Member States, there is not one single inclusive labour market – let alone across the EU as a whole. Bridging these gaps must be a priority. From the exclusion of young workers from meaningful work opportunities to the entrapment of workers into short-term and unreliable contracts, there are a wide range of distinct challenges that reinforce the segmentation of the labour market. Many of the social problems in Europe would be greatly alleviated by concentrating efforts on tackling this issue.

The female labour market participation remains too low in too many Member States. The exclusion of young workers is of particular concern. We already know that periods of unemployment for the young have disproportionate scarring effects across the rest of working lives in terms of earnings and access to good quality jobs. However, the recent political changes make this even more pressing in terms of the long-term sustainability of the EU. Younger people tend to be more pro-EU — note for example the 64% of 18- to 24-year-olds who voted 'remain' in the ultimately unsuccessful UK membership referendum — yet this can easily change, should the growing fears that younger generations will be worse off than their parents come to fruition. In that sense, the EU is at a crossroads in identifying the priorities and policy solutions to falling living standards. The EU is both morally- and treaty-bound to delivering in this regard.

Other groups of workers also need concerted and co-ordinated support in order to access the opportunities that do exist now and will exist in the future if the correct steps are taken. The ETUC welcomes refugees and insists on the adequate and unique support that will be required by people who have suffered gravely. We must also facilitate the (re-)introduction of older and more experienced workers who wish to extend their working lives, with opportunities to retrain where necessary. Ethnic minorities and other marginalised groups must also be integrated into the wide range of life chances engendered by inclusive labour markets.

Finally, the issue of long- and very long-term unemployment must be addressed. The EU, Member States and social partners must intervene as comprehensively as possible as early as possible to eradicate the scourge of European workers finding themselves living 12 and 24 months or more out of work. This is completely unacceptable and is a driver of a whole range of associated social problems. The economic, as well as the social, case is therefore irresistible. Lessons can be learned here from the Youth Guarantee implementation where a similar approach was adopted and social partners were not properly involved in the process. There was consequently a lack of adequate funding and an insufficient monitoring of the outcomes. This must not happen again.

### *Policy priorities*

The EU must work closely with social partners at all levels to deliver fairer and more inclusive labour markets. Again, we welcome the moves that have been made in this regard but the time has come to structure this collaboration more formally.

Firstly, bold action is needed to boost both employment and the number of standard jobs – i.e., those that are permanent and full-time. One way in which this can be highlighted is by adopting the ETUC position of both measuring and setting targets for *full-time equivalence* rather than mere employment. This can be adapted to National Reform

Programmes, for example, and would show where the employment challenges really are. Having a reasonably high level of overall employment that relies on excessively short and unreliable contracts can for example create highly abusive forms of employment in which workers are unable to enjoy their workplace rights and access to associated social security where appropriate.

Secondly, the ETUC demands a commitment to quality employment in the AGS 2017. The mantra of ‘any job is better than no job’ cannot be the limit of ambition in Europe. A commitment to quality employment should encompass ensuring decent wages, adequate working time and work-life balance, good working conditions and job security, access to training and career development, and collective interest representation, as well as countering non-standard forms of employment. This must also include an inclusive transition towards good and fair digital work based on the same standards. Digitalisation of the labour market must not be allowed to further split society into a few winners and many losers, thus contributing to an even more unequal distribution of wealth: a progressive approach towards digitalisation is of the utmost importance. The new digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, automatization and 3D printing will change our society and labour markets.

Thirdly, we need investment in active labour market policies (ALMPs) beyond long-term unemployment across the EU. These are the policies that were often cut in reaction to the crises. By working with unions, these policy options must be tailored to the specific, and in many cases severe, needs for reinvigorating labour markets to face the challenges of the future. In many Member States, austerity policies have seen the marginalisation and even abolition of valuable labour market institutions.

Fourthly, a revamped skills agenda must be central to reinvigorating European labour markets. The ETUC welcomes the recent Skills Agenda released by the Commission and urges them to go further in recognition of the fact that Europe needs to support increases in workers’ skills as society and economies transition via digitalisation, decarbonisation and aging workforces. This means strengthening the ‘Skills Guarantee’ strategy and establishing durable mechanisms for negotiation with unions on skills investment at all levels. It also means lifelong learning strategies to develop the right skills with focus on the new technologies that can bring growth and prosperity to Europe. Taking into consideration the bad prospects for young Europeans in the labour market, a real and effective Youth Guarantee is still needed. It is not acceptable that it only delivers internships or low-quality short-term jobs. The focus must again be on quality jobs. The ETUC calls for the continuation of the budgetary lines beyond 2016. Our benchmark in terms of appropriate funding of the Youth Guarantee is the estimation made by the ILO of 21 billion euros per year.

Finally, there must be a set of robust and collaborative interventions on the intractable issue of long-term unemployment. The ETUC and affiliates stand ready to assist in this regard. The Council Recommendation on this was adopted during the 2016 European Semester cycle and is a very welcome intervention; national governments must, however, include trade unions in delivering this. The wealth of experience and good faith that is unique to trade unions in hard-to-reach communities is a hugely under-exploited resource. We stand ready to develop ideas in collaboration with public employment services and policy makers.

### Collective bargaining and wages

The AGS 2017 must tackle increasing income inequality throughout Europe. Inequality is a brake to economic recovery as well as a source of social discord. Moreover, this rank inequality is not a natural phenomenon, but the result of policy prescriptions followed which have reduced welfare expenditure and depressed wages across Europe. Studies show that economic growth, where this exists, does not benefit all. The 2030 agenda therefore aims to sustain per capita economic growth thanks to higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation (goal 8).

Social mobility is stagnating and wage-earners are losing out the most. Structural reforms are perceived as the main reason for the impoverishment of households that depend on wage-earners. Flat wage dynamics in Europe are due to labour reforms that have weakened labour market institutions, and widened discrimination gaps. Reduced wage share comes from pay gaps affecting non-standard jobs, gender gaps (in both employment and pay) and significant pay gaps are also observed as linked to migration backgrounds. Another area of discrimination is with regard to newly hired workers, especially young workers.

Collective bargaining has not been allowed to contribute to economic growth as it should. Reforms imposed during the crisis have reduced the scope, coverage and enforcement of collective agreements (already threatened by external factors such as the interdependence of global economies, technological change, demography and the movement of people). Fragmentation of collective agreements in a multitude of company agreements have impoverished the collective bargaining contents and underused the capacity of social partners to co-regulate the labour market and the workplace.

Recent reforms of labour market institutions have thwarted autonomy and efficiency of collective bargaining throughout Europe. Against the background of a deep economic crisis, an increasing number of European countries are moving towards a radical change in collective bargaining patterns, characterised by State intervention, which may entail the undermining of long-standing bargaining structures. In many cases, the driving force behind these developments was the SGP rules (see the above section on macroeconomic policy).

For years, the Commission's recommendations were clearly oriented towards an unregulated general decentralisation of collective bargaining. This orientation partly comes from the conviction that the wage-setting power of trade unions had to be reduced. As a result, in recent years the Commission's recommendations induced a unilaterally-decided and radical decentralisation of collective bargaining, which has in some cases contributed to the erosion of national and industry-level bargaining.

Statutory minimum wages are insufficient for tackling in-work poverty. They remain too low in absolute terms, especially in Central and Eastern European countries. The composition of rights around minimum wages is often unclear, which opens up scope for abuse.

*Wage policy priorities and boosting collective bargaining*

The EU, as a wage-led economy, needs to boost internal demand for economic recovery. Wages have been lagging behind productivity in all countries for years, reducing consumption and depressing internal demand.

Europe needs a Pay Rise to deliver enduring growth with greater equality. This means that the AGS 2017 should pursue two main policy options in this regard. Firstly, enable collective bargaining autonomy to rebalance bargaining strength in a more equitable manner. This means increasing coverage. Secondly, make low wages rise faster than the highest and boost statutory minimum wages to at least 60% of the median wage or 50% of the average wage in Member States where this is applicable.

As a minimum, the ETUC wants to see the 'golden wage rule' work aligning real wage trends with productivity. This means that in the future, wage trends will follow the golden rule of 'inflation + productivity gains', within free and balanced collective bargaining rounds. The AGS 2016 overlooked the fact that since the economic crisis started in 2008, real wages underperformed in all EU countries. The AGS 2017 should help wage-earners in Europe recover what they have lost during the crisis period for the benefit of the entire EU economy.

Stepping up progressive convergence of wages is essential. Such convergence should be operated by social partners at different levels: (a) to fill the gaps existing in low and high wage countries (in particular boosting wage developments in CEECs); and (b) among sectors of services and industry. Collective agreements increasingly serve a distributive function as part of a solidaristic wage policy. They ensure progressive wages motivating workers during their professional developments and careers. Social clauses in public procurement should also require the application and enforcement of relevant collective agreements.

The key objective of the distributive function is to ensure that productivity gains are shared equally by all workers on the one hand, and to ensure a more egalitarian wage structure that cuts the distance between the bottom and the top of the wage scale on the other. Countries with collectively agreed wages have more effective wage scales that better remunerate staff according to different criteria (skills, career progression, seniority, awards and other allowances, etc.) which improve solidarity and equality, but at the same time contribute to efficiency in work organisation. This can boost productivity and competitiveness – i.e., a win-win deal between capital and labour.

It is necessary to improve Statutory Minimum Wage (SMWs) levels and make the definitions and the implementation of SMWs more transparent and effective. Minimum wages should progressively achieve and sustain the income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average, as stated in the UN2030 agenda and SDG 10. In a situation of increasing average wages, Statutory Minimum Wages should converge toward either 60% of the median wage or 50% of the average wage, offering Member States and their national social partners the possibility to opt for the target that fits with their national situation, assuming that requirements of the ETUC resolution on Minimum Wages are fulfilled. The AGS 2017 should also look at how to implement the SDG 5 to eliminate gender pay gaps.

In particular, the AGS 2017 should enhance the potential of multi-employer collective bargaining to create a level playing field for SMEs. It can be burdensome for social partners to negotiate company-based solutions in such small organisations. Experience shows that centralised collective bargaining structures can set flexible frameworks (setting criteria for flexible salaries, mutualisation of risks, collectivising of resources, creating specific services, etc.) that can benefit SMEs and their employees.

Finally, the AGS 2017 should seek to restore balance in power relations between the sides of industry. Ensuring respect and the enforcement of trade union rights is a component of balanced negotiation powers. Inspired by the quadripartite Declaration for a New Social Dialogue in Europe, the AGS 2017 should promote a stronger dialogue between national social partners which is conducive to collective bargaining. Within the European Semester, social dialogue, when helping convergence on short-term and medium-term macroeconomic objectives, has to leave space for more autonomous collective bargaining in wage formation. This is essential as, in many countries, there is evidence of a wage premium for all when wages are determined by collective agreements.

A significant investment in capacity-building of social partners in delivering efficient multi-employer collective bargaining should be at the core of the European Semester, via recommendations to Member States to help and support social partners in this respect. This is particularly needed in countries where collective bargaining institutions have been dismantled or decentralised in recent years, and in countries where such institutions do not exist. It should be established that wage upward convergence is needed, by reinforcing social partners' representativeness and capacity to deliver proper negotiations. In such cases, targeted national legal frameworks to promote industrial relations should be considered, allowing the opportunity

## Social protection challenges and pension provision

Lower public expenditure on welfare is a major concern and public expenditure has continued to fall during the financial crisis. Reduced performances of social transfers thwarted anti-poverty policies in Europe. Of exceptional concern are pensions after previous European Semester cycles implemented reforms leading to fragmentation and unclear accessibility criteria. Instead of increasing funding to cover aging populations access has been limited on the grounds of generalised life expectancy, regardless of either working history or actual retirement needs. The result, inevitably, is old-age poverty.

The population living at risk of social exclusion and poverty is high and rising. Poverty is more than ever entrenched in continued periods of unemployment and/or exclusion from the labour market with a particularly profound effect on women (who continue to be hit by gender-based pay and pension gaps, the lack of recognition of the care work they do and other informal work). In addition, poverty continues to afflict the young and elderly people, workers with disabilities (whose right to public support and social assistance has diminished) and migrants (generally not covered by public social protection policies, discriminated on several grounds and too often segregated in the informal economy). Safety nets and social benefit provision are quite simply insufficient in their quality, quantity and coverage. This is all exacerbated by shortcomings in social investment, especially in education and in the provision of assistance enabling social inclusion.

The ETUC is convinced that well-managed immigration can help to address the societal challenges that Europe has to cope with in the coming years. Maintaining a positive net migration rate should be a medium-term objective of the EU. But newcomers should be enabled quickly and fully to contribute to the socio-economic development of the hosting societies, in common with all other members of the hosting communities. Equal treatment is the glue of a cohesive society and equal opportunities are the engine of dynamic societies. All EU policies should consistently promote investment in universal and quality public services and goods. It is a task of the migration policy to put migrants in the solidarity cycle, preserving social cohesion.

*Policy priorities*

The universal coverage, accessibility and quality of social protection and welfare must increase. Public expenditure for social protection must be increased in line with real social and demographic need. Member states must commit to gathering resources by tackling tax evasion and combatting the illegal and irregular economy, thus supporting labour institutions and inspections. There must at all times be integrated policy interventions, especially in terms of job creation, quality employment, contribution continuity, and substantial improvement of social security and social protection systems, starting from the most vulnerable groups. The AGS 2017 must enable the creation of solid floors on poverty and care, ensuring that they are met through the Semester process. Advancements must be assessed against national and then European standards.

Universal coverage and legal certainty on the timeframe and conditions of accessing pensions must be ensured. The sustainability of the pension systems cannot be based on the prolongation of working lives in relation to life-expectancy figures, but must be founded on coherent economic and social policies, promoting sustainable economic growth, high-quality jobs, decent wages and the reinforcement of collective bargaining. Pension adequacy (including indexation and protection of purchasing power) must be addressed, coherently with the increasingly ageing population and the urgency of tackling old age poverty. The public pension system must be promoted and grant universal coverage and adequate pensions: supplementary schemes must not drain resources from it.

The problem of adequacy is a major one. Concerning the pensions, the reforms adopted in recent years has decreased the level of social security on the logic of sustainability. The baseline scenario of the 2015 Ageing Report is that despite the strong rise in the proportion of people aged 65 and over, average public pension expenditure for EU-28 could be no higher in 2060 than in 2013. Should pension policies be designed under this scenario, we will face dramatic consequences: the return of massive poverty in the old age. The ETUC cannot accept this and therefore demand a rethink of economic and social policies in order to ensure economic growth, employment creation and good wages building fairer and more redistributive societies.

Minimum income schemes, at an adequate level, should be introduced in all national social protection legislation. As part of an overall policy to strengthen social protection systems, a European framework directive on an adequate minimum income should establish common principles, definitions and methods for minimum income schemes in the Member States, to ensure a decent standard of guaranteed income for everyone in the EU. Such schemes need to be inclusive and embedded in a broader EU and national policy response while combining income support with active inclusion and access to quality services.

Public investment in social services is a priority and must address the needs of all EU residents to public, accessible, high-quality health, child and elderly care services. Long-term care should be an established social right, recognised in all Member State welfare systems, and embodied in a common European standard. Care workers ensure the rights of disabled people and others who may need help to live a dignified life. The EU must recognise and formalise the work of millions of carers, improving of their skills and working conditions, and so granting better jobs as well as higher quality services. The role of public authorities must be prominent, so as to grant the efficiency and the universality of high quality service provisions.

The lack of investment in the health care system results in poor health outcomes which leads to a loss of potential within the workforce. Sufficient public investment in health care services is vitally important for healthy populations which means that we need investment in decent remuneration of healthcare personnel, accessible high-quality health care services and healthcare infrastructure, as well as adequate investment in the efficient professional governance of healthcare services.

Working conditions of migrants should be dealt with in the European Semester and the Social Pillar, where appropriate. Social rights are universal and should cover the entire population regardless of their nationality or immigration status. Exceptions based on nationality or immigration status are unacceptable. Gaps between workers with different employment or immigration statuses have to be removed.

Labour market inclusion of refugees is a challenge that countries hosting refugees can transform into an opportunity. It is estimated that a rapid integration of refugees can have swift positive effects on GDP for growth of public expenditure to finance new infrastructures and jobs. Even more remarkable effects may be seen in the long term due to the dynamism that refugees may bring to the hosting communities.

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