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EU Launch Seminar: Linking Migration and Development Cooperation: European Experiences and Policy Reflections

4 June | 12:00–16:30 | Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU in Brussels,
Rue Belliard 65, 1000 Bruxelles



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Welcome remarks

Hugo Verbist, Special Envoy for Migration, Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Belgium



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European perspective - Migration and Development

EU priorities in external migration engagement under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

Bogdana Sybikowska, International Relations Officer, Directorate-General Migration & Home Affairs, European Commission

Samuel Simon Pulido, Head of Sector in the Migration and Forced Displacement Unit, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission

Framing the anthology

Linking Migration and Development: European Experiences and Policy Lessons for Sweden

Iris Luthman, Research Coordinator at the Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi) and editor of the anthology

Henrik Malm Lindberg, Deputy Head of Secretariat at the Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi) and editor of the anthology

Mats Hårsmar, Deputy Managing Director, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)



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LINKING MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

European experiences and policy lessons for Sweden

Mats Hårsmar
The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

Iris Luthman & Henrik Malm Lindberg
The Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi)

Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU
Brussels | 4 June

Why this anthology, why now?

“ The question is no longer whether migration and development are linked — but how the linkage is governed.

A changed policy environment

Migration has become a strategic reference point in European development cooperation — through partnerships, return and reintegration, mobility, migration governance and external engagement.

A practical implementation question

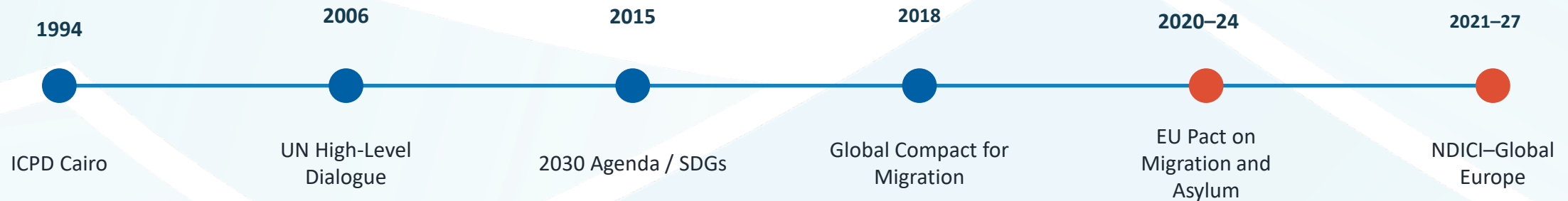
Many actors in this room work at exactly this interface: translating broad political commitments into programmes, partnerships and results on the ground.

A comparative contribution

The anthology draws lessons from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway — not as models to copy, but as experience to learn from.



A European policy field under construction



Migration is increasingly embedded in external relations and development programming.

The agenda combines protection, mobility, governance, return, readmission and reintegration.

This creates opportunities for coherence — but also sharper trade-offs.

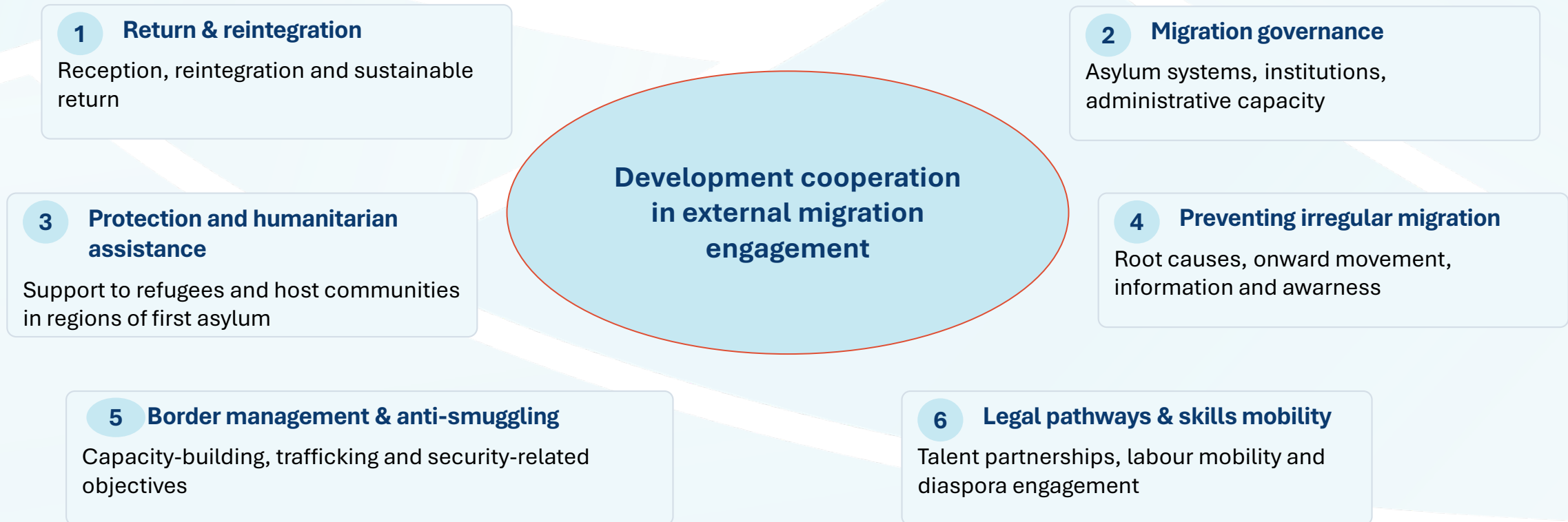
The shift is not from “no link” to “link” — but from a broad development-oriented nexus to a more operational migration-governance agenda.

What has changed since 2015?

- The linkage has become more **political**, **operational** and **strategically** tied to external migration engagement.
- Development cooperation is increasingly expected to contribute to governance, return, reintegration, protection, mobility and partnerships.
- The drivers include migration crises, electoral politics, new governments, EU-level instruments and pressure for cooperation on return and readmission.

What are we asking development cooperation to do?

Development cooperation is increasingly used across several forms of external migration engagement – each with different instruments, risks and evidence needs.



Also relevant: in-donor refugee costs / ODA deductions

Migration can affect development budgets not only through external programming, but also through domestic reception costs.

What the anthology asks

Not primarily:

Should migration and development be linked?



But:

How are these linkages managed in practice and with what effects?

Integration

How are migration objectives incorporated into development frameworks and programmes?

Governance

How are roles, mandates and coordination arranged across institutions?

Coherence

How are development principles, rights and ownership protected?

Effects

What can realistically be achieved — and what can be measured?

Four cases — one shared dilemma

Denmark



Most explicit and politically driven linkage; strong steering and “solidarity at a distance”.

Germany



Programmatic, institutionalised and often framed through win-win partnerships.

Netherlands



Clear political reframing and strong alignment with migration management priorities.

Norway



More gradual and cautious integration within existing development frames.

The cases are comparable enough to learn from — but different enough to reveal choices.

All are established donors with substantial migration experience.

All have faced political pressure after 2015.

They differ in EU relationship, administrative model, political framing and implementation choices.

Five cross-cutting findings

1

Migration has moved into development cooperation

Across cases, migration is now a more prominent reference point for funding, programming and partnerships.

2

Coordination is essential — but difficult

Whole-of-government approaches can reduce silos, but do not automatically create coherence.

5

Effects are limited and hard to measure

Project-level outputs exist, but aggregate migration impacts are modest and difficult to attribute.

3

Core development principles are under pressure

Poverty reduction, ownership, rights and transparency can become harder to safeguard.

4

Conditionality more often signal than sanction

Explicit aid withdrawal is rare. In practice, countries more often rely on incentives, diplomatic signalling, prioritisation and partnership-based arrangements.

Finding 1: Migration objectives more prominent but integrated in different ways



A shared pattern

Migration objectives are often introduced through gradual adaptation of existing development instruments rather than through fully new institutional architecture.

A key difference

The political framing differs: from cautious humanitarian language to explicit use of development cooperation for migration-management objectives.

A key mechanism: institutional drift

Existing development instruments



New migration-related expectations



Changed practice

What changes?

Mandates may remain formally stable, while programmes, priorities, indicators and partnerships shift gradually.

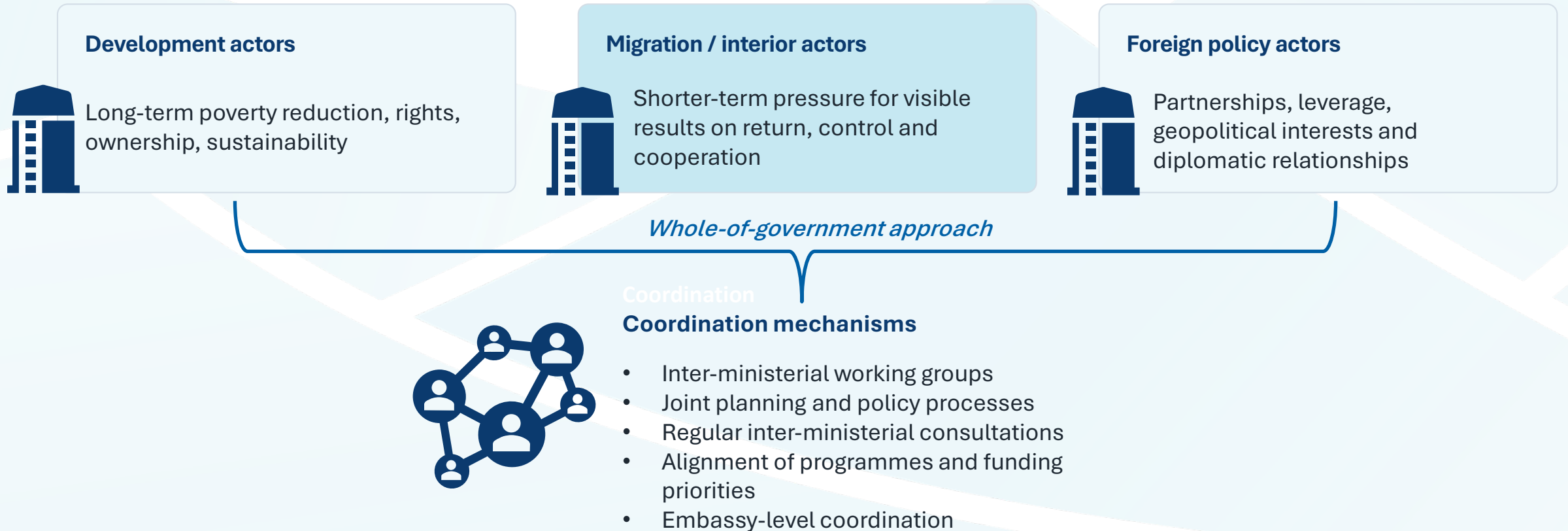
Why it matters

Drift affects transparency, accountability and evaluation: what is the intervention expected to achieve, and for whom?

Typical fields

Return and reintegration, migration governance, information campaigns, mobility schemes and diaspora engagement.

Finding 2: Coordination is necessary — but does not guarantee coherence



Coordination creates contact points; coherence still has to be negotiated.

Finding 3: Coherence and principles become harder to safeguard

Policy coherence for development

How can migration objectives be pursued without undermining development objectives?

Ownership and partnership

Whose priorities shape programming — partner countries, implementing agencies or donor governments?

Rights and protection

How are migrants, returnees, refugees and host communities protected in practice?

The tension is not necessarily migration versus development. It is short-term control expectations versus long-term development logic.

The more aid is framed as a migration-control instrument, the sharper the trade-offs become.

When migration objectives are formulated less explicitly, trade-offs may appear less visible — but transparency, accountability and evaluability also risk becoming weaker.

Finding 4: Conditionality is often more signal than sanction

Most practice sits on the left and middle of the spectrum.



Impact depends on what “success” is understood to mean

What development cooperation can plausibly contribute to

- Capacity building and migration governance
- Individual reintegration outcomes
- Protection and support in host communities
- Targeted legal mobility and skills partnerships
- Project-level outputs and institutional learning
- Shared-interest partnerships in specific areas
- Long-term stability and resilience

What it is unlikely to deliver quickly

- Rapid reductions in irregular migration
- Automatic increases in return rates
- Large changes in aggregate migration dynamics
- Easily attributable macro-level effects
- Absence of unintended consequences

The question is not only “does it work?” but “for which objective, at what level and over what time horizon?” *Policy expectations need to match what the evidence can support.*

Where are the most promising entry points?

Specific goals

Define narrow, realistic objectives rather than broad claims about migration reduction.

Shared interests and partner ownership

Design with partner governments, local actors, migrants, returnees and host communities.

Strong theories of change

Make explicit how an activity is expected to affect institutions, individuals or cooperation.

Independent learning

Build monitoring and evaluation around learning, not only reporting.

The question is less “does the nexus work?” and more “which instrument, for which objective, in which context?”

Policy implications for EU and Member State practice

1

Realism

Avoid over-selling aid as a quick migration-management tool.

2

Coordination

Create clear mandates between EU, Member States, development actors and migration authorities.

3

Clarity

Be explicit about dual objectives and trade-offs.

4

Safeguards

Protect rights, partner ownership, anti-corruption and do-no-harm principles.

5

Evidence

Invest in evaluation designs that can test assumptions rather than confirm narratives.

“

Legitimacy depends on showing not only that migration and development are linked — but that the link is governed responsibly.

From comparative evidence to policy reflection

Three takeaways

1. The linkage is here to stay

Migration and development cooperation are increasingly part of the same policy conversation.

2. Design matters

Outcomes depend less on slogans and more on governance, mandates, partnerships and implementation capacity.

3. Evidence matters

The field needs stronger theories of change, better evaluation and more honest claims about impact.

The country perspectives that follow show how these tensions look in practice.

Thank you.

Country perspectives

Dutch, German and Belgian experiences in linking migration and development policies

Arjen Leerkes, Professor of Migration, Securitisation and Social Cohesion at the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance and co-author of the Dutch chapter in the anthology

Anna Knoll, Head of the Migration and Mobility Team at the European Centre for Development Policy Management and author of the German chapter

Raffaella Greco Tonegutti, Coordinator Human Mobility, the Belgian Development Agency

Germany's



“Whole-of-government
approach to linking migration
and development cooperation

Anna Knoll
04/06/2026



Germany's whole-of-government approach to migration and development

- 1_** Migration as a cross-cutting issue, objectives increasingly integrated into a broad development cooperation agenda
- 2_** Coordination across distinct mandates
- 3_** Broad migration portfolio of BMZ, development-framing → layered partnerships
- 4_** But tensions are managed rather than fully resolved



How has Germany applied ‘conditionality’?



How it is presented

Migration cooperation embedded in broader partnerships

‘More for more’ rather than sanctions

BMZ provides positive incentives



In practice

Negotiated and often implicit



Shifting context

Recent political debates more accepting of stronger migration conditionality

Germany’s approach has relied primarily on positive and negotiated forms of conditionality, but the boundary between partnership and pressure remains contested and may be evolving.

Labour Mobility: from “triple win” to impact?

Triple-win logic

Benefits for origin, destination and migrants

Development actors as enablers

Skills, training, institutions rather than recruitment only

Pilots rather than scalable systems

Strong institutional learning, limited evidence of broader transformation

Underlying tension

Development objectives \longleftrightarrow German labour demand

What counts as success?

- People utilise mobility pathways / people move
- Development gains harder to demonstrate (often assumed rather than demonstrated)
- Long-term impacts remain uncertain

Return and Reintegration: reconciling development and migration objectives?

Development framing

Reintegration, livelihoods, local development

Embedded in broader partnerships

Return not pursued as stand-alone objective

Underlying tension

Sustainable reintegration \longleftrightarrow return pressures

What counts as success?

- Positive individual outcomes (reintegration support)
- Systemic and migration effects uncertain
- Sustainability remains difficult to measure





Looking ahead: partnerships in a changing strategic context

- 1_** Partnerships as strategic assets
- 2_** Competing strategic interests
- 3_** Migration diplomacy & cooperation



Thank you!

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Anna Knoll – ak@ecdpm.org

Panel discussion

Policy-oriented discussion bringing together researchers, experts and practitioners from different Member States, followed by questions from the audience

Melissa Siegel, Professor of Migration Studies and Head of Migration Studies at the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance and co-author of the Dutch chapter in the anthology

Jonathan Chaloff, Senior Policy Analyst, International Migration Division, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Jason Gagnon, Senior Advisor; Research Affiliate, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Moderator: Hanne Beirens, Visiting Professor at the College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium)



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Closing remarks

Hugo Rickberg, Senior expert, Swedish Migration Agency / EMN Sweden