



Local & Regional
Europe

Refugee crisis

For a common European Asylum Policy at all
levels of government

CEMR Resolution

07 December 2015

RESOLUTION

FOR A COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM POLICY AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

CEMR Policy Committee, Paris 7 December 2015

We, mayors and elected representatives of Europe's local and regional governments, assembled at the Policy Committee of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions in Paris, France, on 7 December 2015, declare our concern for the unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Europe and:

Recalling that since the start of this crisis, many cities and regions have been on the frontline by providing immediate emergency assistance to those who are in need. From small villages to larger cities, provinces, counties and regions, we are volunteering to host refugees in order to respond to the humanitarian crisis, despite having insufficient time to prepare and having received little support from our central governments.

Conscious that it is our towns, cities and regions in the Mediterranean and the Aegean, along with those on the Western Balkan Road, Eastern neighbouring countries and in the heart of the European Union, which migrants and asylum seekers strive to reach and therefore, are the main hotspots that must confront these extreme humanitarian challenges.

Recalling that we have provided shelters, food, health services, social assistance, child-care when no other institution was able to do so while assuming a disproportionate responsibility for delivering emergency assistance, in coordination with volunteer groups and NGOs.

Acknowledging the unwavering effort at the local and regional levels to tackle the crisis, and therefore demonstrating our ability able to go beyond words and to act.

Reaffirming the need to improve the partnership principle between all levels of governance, as well as the coordination efforts between the EU, national, regional and local governments together with their national representative associations and civil society.

Recognising that without the involvement of local and regional governments, there can be no practical implementation of the agreements concluded at EU and national levels.

Reminding that we have started to analyse the needs, collect and share data and good practices among our members, promoted public awareness and solidarity campaigns while triggered exchanges and debates at top political level between our elected members and within the European Parliament and the European Commission in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Knowing that the major work of integration still lies ahead. Integration is not conceivable without local and regional governments.

We declare as follows:

I. Political efforts at European and national level

1. **We**, Towns, Cities, Counties and Regions of Europe pledge for a united, adequate and integrated response to the refugee crisis, in line with our European values of solidarity and respect for human rights, and involving all levels of governance.
2. **We** welcome the current efforts made by the European institutions, such as the discussion on the revision of the Dublin Regulation and the commitment to ensure a fairer share of responsibilities among Member States concerned through the relocation system. We believe however, that local and regional authorities need further support in order to be able to provide effective and holistic responses to the refugee crisis.
3. Considering that the established hotspots in the border countries of the European Union are responsible for registering arriving refugees for the first time and for assessing the prospects that their asylum application may be successful, **we** urge the European and national institutions to ensure that these hotspots become operational as quickly as possible.
4. Asylum seekers from secure countries of origin should pass the entire asylum procedure in those hotspots located near the border of the EU. **We** therefore welcome that the EU has agreed upon a list of secure countries of origin, and we invite the EU to implement this decision.
5. In order to prevent the potential failure of the European Union and to avoid the erection of border fences in Europe, **we** welcome the decision of the European Union and its Member States concerned to take and implement the necessary measures for strengthening, better managing and safeguarding the external European borders. This is a necessary prerequisite for the functioning of the Schengen Agreement.
6. **We** call for a system with more solidarity between the Member States and a fair approach at EU level. Today, the Member States of first arrival are disproportionately hit by the current refugee crisis. We, therefore, urge the European Union to amend the Dublin Regulation accordingly as soon as possible. A precondition for a well-functioning solidary Asylum system is the registration of all new refugees in the Members States of first arrival.
7. **We** urge the European Union for assurances that those refugees with a prospect of remaining in the EU should then be distributed in an equitable way among the Member States, according to a fixed quota. This relocation scheme should be binding for refugees. In cases where refugees find a legal job in another Member State, they should have the opportunity to move to that Member State, in line with the fixed quota at EU level. This equity in relocation is extremely necessary in order to avoid the risk of a failure of the European Union.
8. Beyond funding mechanisms, **we** also call for further development of the partnership principle and co-decision spirit between the EU, national, local and regional governments within the different existing institutional structures of decision-making in this field.
9. **We** consider that the exodus of thousands of persons seeking asylum and protection in Europe cannot solely be considered as an emergency situation, but needs to be addressed as a problem requiring structural and effective measures that take human rights into consideration. We need policies that respond to challenges faced by countries of origin so as to achieve peace, stability and sustainable development in a long term perspective.

- 10 **We** urge the European Commission to design a comprehensive framework of long-term and holistic integration policies for those who will obtain asylum in the EU to give them the keys for a good professional, educational and social integration in our societies.

II. Funding requirements

- 11 **We** regret that, in the framework of the existing funding mechanisms at the EU level, no specific resources have been set aside to properly address the challenges at the local and regional levels. Accordingly, we call upon the European institutions to establish the necessary measures to ensure that existing funding mechanisms reach those who are most in need, to provide housing, health care, social support, education and integration in general.
- 12 **We** call on the European Commission to assess whether new mechanisms and underused resources from the previous financial framework (2007-2013), could be used to help local and regional authorities to better confront their responsibilities in this field.
- 13 **We** believe that there is still room for the reinforcement and better implementation of the partnership principle in the design, monitoring and evaluation phases of all the different existing EU funding mechanisms, including the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); the Internal Security Fund (ISF); the European Social Fund (ESF); the Pre-Accession Instrument and the European Neighbourhood Instrument.
- 14 **We** call upon national and European authorities to organise early consultation processes, to share information and data, to ensure better monitoring of cooperation between all levels of government and to simplify processes for applying for EU funding.
- 15 **We** welcome the approval of the European Parliament and the Council to allocate part of the additional incomes in 2015 to the 2016 budget and to measures on migration; **we** urge Member States to use these resources to help solve the refugee crisis at the local and regional level.
- 16 In the framework of the MFF revision process in 2016, and in relation to those Member States to which the Treaty provisions on freedom, security and justice apply, **we** call for a more balanced distribution of the part of the EU budget dedicated to asylum, migration and integration, and more concretely, that more resources are allocated to integration measures at local and regional level, rather than to relocation and return policies.

III. Contribution of local and regional authorities

- 17 **We** express our desire to further develop capacity-building, peer-review learning and to exchange best practices between different tiers of government, in close cooperation with civil society in order to arrive at an effective response to the crisis. We should also continue assessing the different material (financial resources) and institutional mechanisms at EU level, in order to see how they could be better used to improve their usefulness for local and regional authorities.
- 18 **We** encourage European, national, regional and local authorities to boost efforts in improving communication to citizens on the changing situation, so as to prevent the circulation of hate speech and to ensure support for and ownership of the appropriate responses necessary to address the crisis at all levels. In addition, we call on the media to take up its responsibility, in order to avoid radicalisation and the spreading of extremist views.

- 19 **We** call upon Local and Regional Governments to cooperate together with their peers in “first arrival”, transit and final destination areas and exchange their experience in the field of integration of migrants and refugees through CEMR and regional networks such as NALAS.
- 20 **We** remind Europe’s decision-makers that numerous local governments are cooperating with their peers and representative associations at the European and world levels, such as PLATFORMA and UCLG in developing countries, to facilitate the achievement of the recently approved Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) through programmes of decentralised cooperation.



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About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 50 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 150 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

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