



Lisbon, Portugal, 26 October 2016

13TH Ministerial Session of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)

Morning Session: New needs: learning from the refugee crisis

Statement by Mr Dominique Lamiot, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Council of Europe Development Bank

'CEB's response to emergency situations and to migrant and refugee flows'

Check against delivery

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current migrant and refugee crisis gripping the European continent is having a profound impact, not only on those individuals fleeing conflict-ridden regions, but also on the transit and recipient states. Yet this is not the first experience of its kind to take place on European soil.

Establishment of the CEB

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the freshly established Council of Europe had a duty to help the people who had been forced to flee regions affected by political and economic upheaval.

A flexible financial mechanism with a social purpose and the legal capacity to borrow and finance projects for the settlement of refugees and displaced persons was the recommended course of action. The aim was clear: rebuild Europe by notably helping refugees who were not covered by the Geneva Convention.

This led to the establishment in 1956 of the "Council of Europe Resettlement Fund for Refugees", operating under the supreme authority of the Council of Europe.

The challenge was considerable; there were estimated to be 30 million displaced persons in post-war Europe at the time. The Fund's first years therefore focussed on projects which funded the construction of housing for these refugees.

The CEB's statutory priorities

Aid to refugees, migrants and displaced persons and support to victims of natural or ecological disasters constitute the statutory priorities of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), the new name of the Fund created in 1956. Over the 60 years since the establishment of the Bank, it has been working on these two priorities in different contexts

and now with a wider geographical scope. The CEB has developed means of action and instruments to address ecological disaster prevention and to facilitate assistance to refugees and migrants.

Also in the current migrant and refugee crisis the Bank was immediately reactive. A little over a year ago the CEB put itself at the disposal of its member countries to intervene in the tragic situation they faced, as well as intensifying dialogue with the Council of Europe to better focus the Bank's action.

I highly appreciate having the opportunity to address you here today to increase awareness of the possibilities offered by the CEB. It is only with the interaction between member countries that present projects and the Bank which can provide technical assistance and loans with very favourable conditions, that projects can be implemented.

Today the object of this conference is improving the situation of vulnerable population groups, which the Bank can assist using the means at its disposal as 'the' social development bank for migrants and refugees.

Natural and ecological disasters

CEB projects in response to natural and ecological disasters involve the reconstruction or rehabilitation of destroyed or damaged infrastructure, in particular housing and basic infrastructure.

The CEB also finances projects specifically targeted at reducing the vulnerability to natural and ecological disasters and mitigation of their risks. Floods, fires, avalanches, earthquakes and landslides are especially concerned.

Over the years the Bank has focused on elaborating its policy to shift the operational focus from the consequences of disasters to long-term preventive measures. This is fully in accordance with national and international environmental standards in matters of sustainable development.

Allow me to give you two examples. In 2014, seismic risk mitigation was the aim of a €250 million CEB loan approved in favour of Turkey. The project contributed to a large-scale, internationally acclaimed project aimed at implementing a comprehensive set of mitigating measures to gradually transform Istanbul into a city as resilient as possible to a major earthquake.

In exceptional cases the Bank can also approve donations through its soft window, the "Social Dividend Account". A recent example of this was a donation approved in response to extensive flooding in 2014 in the Western Balkans, which was used for urgent re-mapping and marking of areas where the floods had unearthed mines and other unexploded devices.

The concept of environmentally induced migration should also be taken into consideration, with climate change, disasters and environmental degradation playing an increasing role in the movements of populations. In this respect, the CEB can work to help member countries reduce and prevent the impact of climate change, as well as towards the integration of environmental migrants.

Refugees, migrants and displaced persons

CEB action, through loans and projects, to aid migrants and refugees has been developing since the Bank's beginnings, as I said, after the Second World War. But beyond providing financing for emergency assistance and resettlement programmes, the CEB focuses its action on the long-term objective of integration of migrants and refugees. Several dimensions are of course encompassed by this cross-sector theme, such as housing, health, education, employment and the environment. Projects may not always be exclusively labelled as being in favour of refugees, migrants and displaced persons; however, the global approach very often includes vulnerable population groups, with a clear focus on refugees, migrants and displaced persons.

Education is also a particularly important component to ensure we ward off the prospect of a "lost generation" of refugee children. This is all the more so when you keep in mind that over a quarter of a million children arrived by sea to Europe in 2015.¹ Educational attainments are vital for subsequent integration everywhere, in particular into the workforce.

The CEB therefore finances projects that include the construction or renovation of schools or financing equipment. For example, a loan in favour of Serbia was approved in 2011 aimed at improving access to education for Roma and other disadvantaged children through the construction of student dormitories and teacher training.

Further projects financed by the Bank aim to improve labour inclusion, especially via micro-finance for the development of micro-enterprises. Improving access to adequate and affordable housing is also financed to address poverty, segregation and urban exclusion. In this context, a loan was approved in 2013 in favour of Bosnia and Herzegovina to part-finance housing units for internally displaced persons living in collective centres.

The CEB, wishing to better respond to the needs of member countries in the field of migrants and refugees, is also actively involved in the joint initiative "Regional Housing Programme". Its purpose is to provide 74,000 refugees and displaced persons, following the 1991-1995 conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia, with durable housing solutions. The programme is supported by the international community in four partner countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.

Given the magnitude of the present situation with the migrants and refugees, and in addition to the Social Dividend Account, the Bank decided to equip itself with a new facility to accord grants to its member countries, in line with its core mandate.

In response to the current situation, the CEB created the "Migrant and Refugee Fund" (MRF) one year ago to provide grants to help set up, improve or operate transit and reception centres in member countries receiving migrants and refugees. It aims to ensure that these persons enjoy basic human rights, as well as to facilitate the long-term integration of migrants and other vulnerable groups.

To date 17 member countries, the European Investment Bank and the CEB itself have already contributed a combined amount to date of over €18 million to the Fund. By end-September the CEB had approved more than €17 million in grants in favour of 15 projects in 7 countries and I hope that other member countries will contribute.

Alongside improvements to reception facilities and infrastructure, notably along the so-called Balkan route, funding in the form of grants from the Fund is also enabling better monitoring of migration flows in Slovenia, Croatia and Greece. Projects also include the financing of

¹ Source: EU, *Compilation of data, situation and media reports on children in migration*

rescue-at-sea equipment and of a mobile medical unit for the island of Lesbos in Greece to effectively rescue migrants and refugees.

Our host country, Portugal, is also being supported by the Fund for the expansion of reception capacities for asylum seekers arriving in Portugal, including one for minors here in Lisbon. As such, it is the first project located outside of the Balkan route to receive MRF support, highlighting that the migrant and refugee crisis is indeed a Europe-wide issue.

Between 2000 and 2015, the CEB approved loans directly in favour of refugees, migrants and displaced persons totalling €1 billion, yet this figure is expected to grow. This is especially the case considering the CEB's global approach to the problems of vulnerable persons, having as an objective their integration.

Conclusion

The CEB's work is more relevant than ever. And the responses which the Bank provides, in line with its resources, are still absolutely vital because the demands in its area of operation, the social sector, are as great as ever.

The CEB is the only European development bank with a statutory social mandate, continuing to support its member countries in answering to the needs of the most vulnerable while of course implementing the objectives and standards of the Council of Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.