

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Declaration 4 (2015)¹ The reception of refugees in Europe

The Congress:

1. notes with concern:

a. that the Declaration of the Bureau of the Congress on the tragic drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean adopted on 31 October 2013 remains distressingly topical and that human dramas are constantly recurring and have spread to all the external borders of the European Union;

b. that, in the absence of a common migration and asylum policy, the large-scale influx of refugees is testing to the limit the solidarity between European States in terms of the fair distribution of migration flows and the resources deployed to accommodate these refugees in conditions worthy of the values promoted by the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities;

c. that alongside a tremendous upsurge of citizen solidarity, this humanitarian emergency also prompts inward-looking attitudes, violent acts of xenophobia and racist remarks, all of which are phenomena against which the Congress has campaigned for many years through its reports, its appeals to the member States of the Council of Europe and its practical action on the ground;

2. resolutely observes:

a. that the States of Europe must assume shared responsibility for accommodating the refugees on their territory, fully respecting the right to asylum in force and to human dignity;

b. that Europe must play a full part in taking in the Syrian refugees, only 6% of whom are on European territory (excluding Turkey), while Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are accommodating more than 4 million;

c. that faced with this humanitarian emergency, local and regional authorities, regardless of their geographical position in Europe, must play a key role in the arrangements for accommodating the refugees, in order to ease the pressure on the border towns and cities and those closest to the Mediterranean and Syria;

d. that this role is reflected in practical terms on the ground by the provision of public buildings converted to accommodate refugees, political and material support to associations specialising in migrant reception, and facilities to help ensure access to administrative formalities, health care and education, etc.;

3. expresses:

a. its deep commitment to the principle of solidarity between European States, social cohesion and harmonious co-existence in a pluricultural society;

b. its unshakable conviction that the right to asylum is a fundamental universal right which must be granted to anyone fleeing war or the threat of death;

c. its categorical rejection of any manipulation of the humanitarian crisis for political ends;

d. its strong determination to tirelessly pursue its active efforts to highlight the rich contribution made by migrants to European societies;

4. asks the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

a. to work together with the European Union to ensure that the question of immigration and the right to asylum are the subject of comprehensive European policies based on dignity and solidarity, designed to promote the reception and integration of migrants;

b. to ensure that local and regional authorities, working with civil society to accommodate refugees, are able to gain better access to national and European funding;

5. appeals to governments of the Council of Europe's member States to take urgent measures with a view to contributing to the political resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East, to collectively combat international terrorism and help the people suffering there;

6. calls on all the local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe:

a. to establish a "European network of cities of solidarity", thereby responding to the European appeal launched on 3 October 2015 by the municipalities of Strasbourg, Catania and Rovereto, in order to co-ordinate more effectively their refugee reception activities and initiatives;

b. to intensify direct contacts between municipalities and regions, including from a cross-border and transnational perspective, in order to provide opportunities for the reception and integration of migrant populations and refugees;

c. to share their best practices within European networks, such as the Intercultural Cities Programme, which have long been working on these issues, and more particularly to enable the authorities that have made the most progress in terms of reception to organise peer training sessions in accordance with an arrangement supported by the Congress.

1. Adopted by the Congress on 21 October 2015, 2nd Sitting, rapporteur: Gunn Marit Helgesen, Norway (R, EPP/CCE).