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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

512RD EESC PLENARY SESSION, 9 AND 10 DECEMBER 2015

Resolution of the European Economic and Social Committee on refugees

(2016/C 071/01)

At its plenary session of 9 and 10 December 2015 (meeting of 10 December), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted this resolution by 174 to 8 with 9 abstentions.

1. The EESC wholeheartedly appreciates the important work civil society is playing in dealing with the refugees fleeing from war-torn countries, and who, therefore, deserve protection according to the Geneva Convention. Without this response, the tragic humanitarian situation which has unfolded in many European countries could have been catastrophic. The European Economic and Social Committee is directly committed to giving voice to this reality, to ensure that it is properly taken into account by the European institutions, governments and other political actors.
2. The EESC is currently organising visits to meet with civil society organisations offering assistance to refugees in 11 Member States (Hungary, Poland, Malta, Greece, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Sweden, Italy, Croatia) and Turkey, as these countries are most affected by the flow of refugees. As the representative body of organised civil society to the European institutions, we will act as their voice at European level.
3. The EESC believes that the current situation requires the EU to develop safe humanitarian corridors for refugees from countries affected by wars and threatened by terrorism and to do this together with the countries where these refugees are mostly concentrated. Beyond that we must establish a truly common European asylum system based on harmonised procedures throughout the EU. This includes uniform asylum status and mutual recognition of asylum decisions, shared responsibility and solidarity and efforts with respect to relocation and resettlement, and a revised Dublin Regulation. In addition, there is a need for robust, solidarity-based systems of burden-sharing, in which a permanent, fair and binding system for allocating those seeking protection between all EU countries would be the first step. Due to the exceptional circumstances and in line with the Stability and Growth Pact, the additional costs of hosting refugees should not, after the thorough examination, be recognised in the public deficits of the Member States.
4. The EESC is also very concerned about the current undermining of the Schengen Agreement and of the principle of free movement, as it is one of the fundamental achievements benefiting EU citizens. It is important to properly secure the external borders of the Schengen countries. However, reinstalling internal barriers and building walls will do nothing to bring EU citizens closer together or foster EU citizenship.
5. It is also crucial to develop immediate measures to address the root causes of the current refugee flows. The EU needs to work with countries of origin and transit on these issues and the EESC insists on the human right-based approach to be taken by the Commission for this cooperation, and not only on a security-based approach. Lastly, the EESC underlines the necessity of including civil society in the dialogue with third countries.

6. The EESC, with its long-standing experience with migration issues, in recent years mainly through the European Integration/Migration Forum, believes integration and inclusion of refugees into our societies must be a two-way process where the social partners and other civil society organisations, together with governments and local authorities, play an essential role. Priority should be given to labour market access and, more specifically, to the recognition of qualifications and the provision of vocational and language training where needed. The European Union should launch a series of measures in reception countries and in the EU to centralise applications for employment, training, and recognition of skills.

7. In order to create the necessary social consensus across Europe, it is essential to fully respect the equal treatment and social rights of both EU citizens and refugees in Europe, with particular attention to the most vulnerable among them. Early investment in the integration of refugees into society and the labour market is important to help refugees rebuild their lives, while minimising potential conflicts with the local population and avoiding greater costs in the future. Adequate funding of local public services and a civil dialogue between refugees and the local population are key to achieving this.

Brussels, 10 December 2015.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Georges DASSIS
