

THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT DEMANDS HUMANE ASSISTANCE AND RIGHTS FOR REFUGEES



Today, the EU's basic humanitarian values are challenged by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers. More than 80% of them are fleeing violence and conflict in countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Some 20% are women and one-third children.

We are confronting an ongoing humanitarian disaster. In April and May alone, the Italian Navy saved thousands of refugees in the Mediterranean, but hundreds more died.

- **In 2016, 208,150 asylum-seekers have arrived in the EU by sea**
- **2,856 have perished at sea**
- **more than 10,000 have died in the Mediterranean since 2014**

Source: UNHCR (June 2016)

Europe is failing to comply with its international obligations to protect refugees. Last year the EU agreed to resettle 22,000 asylum-seekers, offering them a safe and legal pathway into Europe. But so far only 6,321 people from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have been resettled. Out of the 160,000 refugees who were supposed to be relocated from Greece and Italy to other EU countries, only 1,500 have moved elsewhere. In Greece alone, 46,000 people are waiting for their applications to be processed, and in Italy over 10,000 new refugees have arrived since 12 April.

It is vital to help refugees to integrate into the labour market and society, while defending equal treatment and rights for both refugees and local workers. Trade unions are already playing an active role in this regard.

Asylum-seekers' education and skills must be assessed and upgraded, and irregular workers given legal status. An estimated 40% have skills that can benefit the EU labour market immediately. Support is required for the 300,000 or so undocumented people, to avoid the number increasing once short-term humanitarian visas/permits expire.

On 15 June, the European trade union movement, meeting in Rome, calls on the EU and national governments to:

- End all measures that endanger human dignity, rights or the physical integrity of human beings, on EU territory or at its borders.
- Stop inhuman detention conditions in the hotspots and the repeated breaches of refugees' rights to have their asylum applications lawfully processed.
- Abandon the EU-Turkey deal on a Joint Action Plan on Refugees: Member States cannot pay to waive their international obligations to asylum-seekers.
- Recognise and defend the Schengen accord as a major EU achievement, and show political will to resettle asylum-seekers in Europe.
- End austerity policies that have made conditions even more difficult in the countries of arrival; and pay specific attention to the conditions of women and child refugees.
- Support and pay tribute to all individuals and organisations, including civil servants, who are working every day to give asylum-seekers a safe and decent life in Europe.

In this context, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) notes with interest the 'Migration Compact', proposed by the Italian Government to the European Commission and Council. The ETUC will be vigilant in ensuring that such a tool effectively meets the demands of the European trade union movement.

The ETUC supports the fundamental European values of respect for human life and dignity, and opposes populist and xenophobic ideologies. These values must be translated into action. Genuine cooperation between EU Member States in accepting adequate numbers of refugees is essential, in line with the letter and spirit of the Treaties. The ETUC calls for:

- A proactive European asylum policy which respects internationally agreed protection standards, including the UN 1951 Convention on Refugee Status and its 1967 Protocol.
- Ongoing search-and-rescue operations, with greater resources, to avoid more deaths at sea.
- Safe legal avenues, implementing the European Commission resettlement scheme.
- Revision of the Dublin III Regulation covering permanent relocation and higher protection standards for women and child asylum-seekers.
- More effective development support to countries of origin, and EU leadership in restoring peace in conflict areas.
- Adequate high-quality public services for all, especially for employment and housing.
- Well-equipped reception and asylum processing centres with well-trained public-service workers.

The ETUC recognises that bringing asylum-seekers and refugees into the labour market represents a challenge and an opportunity at the same time. The trade unions will:

- Support investments that boost economic growth and quality job creation for the benefit of all.
- Urge public employment services to identify, upgrade and match the skills of refugees, to allow quick access to the labour market. The European Economic and Social Partners' statement on the refugee crisis, to the Tripartite Social Summit of 16 March 2016, must be enforced.
- Pursue full equal treatment in the labour market and equal access to social services for both local workers and migrants, and quality job opportunities for all, as the foundation for fair integration and inclusion of refugees.
- Demand more European funding to be allocated to countries receiving refugees, to fight dumping, exploitation and discrimination arising from the mismanagement of uncontrolled arrivals.

With its 45 million members, the trade union movement in Europe is a bulwark against all forms of intolerance and will continue to press for humanitarian responses to a humanitarian crisis. Unions will recruit and represent all workers, regardless of nationality, and cooperate with other partners to provide assistance to refugees without work. The ETUC will unite with the International Trade Union Confederation and other trade union brothers and sisters all over the world in responding to a crisis that is global as well as European.