

## **ETUC statement on the European refugees and asylum seekers emergency, and on integration of migrants in European labour markets and society**

Adopted at the Executive Committee on 25 and 26 June 2018

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The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is outraged but not surprised by the upsurge of the humanitarian crisis involving refugees, which heightened in the recent sorry saga of the rescue ship Aquarius and its 629 people on board. The populist decision of the Italian government not to allow the rescue boat to dock in the country and the offer of Spain later to accept the ship shows the lack of a credible European policy on migration which we have been criticising since the beginning of the crisis.

This episode, together with many other sad cases happening in the Mediterranean Sea but also at other EU external and internal borders, is a symbol of what is going wrong in Europe. It is about more than just the reform of a common asylum system, it is about the basic values of solidarity, unity and humanitarianism that are the foundation of the European project. It is also about populist and nationalist governments blatantly breaking European and international legal rules such as article 78 of the TFEU, Article 18 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Geneva Convention of 1951 and the Protocol of 1967.

The ETUC reiterates its call to leaders of EU institutions and Member States that will meet at the European Council on 28 June: the reform of the Dublin regulation needs urgent completion. We need a fair and solidarity-based EU asylum policy harmonising protection standards in all member states, establishing binding mechanisms to relocate refugees as well as asylum seekers and establishing European hotspots with quality reception conditions.

Thousands of people continue to lose their lives while trying to cross the Mediterranean (792 fatalities since the beginning of 2018 according to IOM). The number of migrants and refugees entering Europe has declined in 2018 (35,504 as per June 2018, which compares with 73,748 arrivals across the region during the same period last year). Nevertheless, this decline is mainly due to the strongly questionable agreements that the EU signed with Turkey and Libya while the EU programmes with countries of origin are not bringing the expected results. There must be stronger links between the financial assistance provided by the EU and the economic and social development in the countries of origin and transit to create decent jobs and opportunities for people considering migration.

The relocation measures introduced with the European Agenda on Migration in 2015 to transfer some categories of asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other EU countries did not work. It should have involved 160,000 asylum seekers who are almost sure to obtain protection - and therefore Syrians, Eritreans and Iraqis - but since the Union has no legislative instruments to make a temporary instrument of this kind binding, lots of the countries have ignored their agreed commitment. In three years Hungary and Poland did not take any asylum seeker from either Italy or Greece while some other countries have welcomed only a very limited number of asylum seekers. Similar gaps can be drawn for the resettlement schemes introduced since 2015 with no refugees being resettled under EU schemes 2015-2018 by Cyprus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. It should be noted that Denmark and the UK have an opt-out from the schemes.

The refugee crisis will not be resolved by sealing the EU borders, erecting fences, closing ports, refusing a fair share of refugees or attempting to discharge the responsibility elsewhere.

European governments have been in denial about the ineffectual nature of migration policy based on selectivity and circularity and totally incompatible with actual composition of the migration flows worldwide.

What we want instead is a comprehensive migration agenda, based on solidarity, integration and inclusiveness for the benefit of all, based on full equal treatment and non-discrimination. We also advocate for the establishment of new safe and legal channels for migration.

Europe needs to set an example and send a message of hope not of threat for the entire world and be a leader in the adoption of an inclusive and fair Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

A renewed strategy for cooperation with countries of origin and transit of refugees, particularly in Africa, is essential, and must focus on respect of human rights, economic solidarity and social sustainability, rather than on attempting to stop refugees coming to Europe.

In addition to the need for a humane and progressive European asylum policy, the challenges for a holistic approach to the migration issue remain and there is a need to further strengthen trade unions' actions in this field at all levels if we want to be successful.

Key issues such as integration and inclusion of migrants in the labour market and in society have been obscured by xenophobic rhetoric. Europe cannot continue to be kept hostage by a handful of member states with evident intentions to feed populism for electoral purposes. The ETUC considers the integration of asylum seekers and refugees essential, as is the integration of migrants in general.

Migrants and native workers are played against each other by xenophobic propaganda, and also by corporate interests to exploit migrants as cheap labour. The far-right narrative, which transforms migrants into the enemies of workers, can be opposed only with a comprehensive strategy based on investment in sustainable growth, quality job creation and social inclusion. We act for all workers, native and migrants, so everyone can enjoy a quality job, a decent wage, fair working conditions and universal social protection. This is about an integration policy based on equal-treatment.

In addition, evidence shows that foreign populations will offset the demographic decline, that some economic sectors are in urgent need of workforce, and that migrants' contribution will make social security systems sustainable. But to reap the benefits of that, refugees and migrants have to be quickly integrated in the host societies, also by learning local languages and showing willingness to integrate.

The ETUC and its affiliates have always been at the forefront in the battle for fair migration and asylum in the EU, and will continue to stand in defence of human, labour and social rights, through their capacity of mobilising and lobbying, through social dialogue and collective bargaining, through the development of networks providing assistance and support to migrants and refugees, including UnionMigrantNet.

The European partnership for integration that ETUC signed with the European Commission and the economic partners (BusinessEurope, CEEP, UEAPME and Eurochambers) reaffirms the importance of integration to address the challenges posed by migration. For migrants, having a job and joining a union are key for a successful integration in hosting communities. The implementation of the Partnership at all relevant levels should be our priority.

European trade union solidarity is essential to help national trade unions to cope with the current challenges posed by the refugee and migration emergency and the ETUC and its affiliates will continue to be at the forefront of this battle.

*Sofia, 25 June 2018*