



World Refugee Day reminds us it's time for ambitious pragmatism to stop the scourge

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Millions are fleeing war or persecution worldwide. As we commemorate their strength and courage on World Refugee Day, we can hardly stay quiet as we see the number increase every year, reaching in 2018 the record of 70.8 million displaced people – 11 million higher than the total population of Italy - 29.4 million are refugees or asylum seekers.

These people without hope are forced to flee conflicts, human rights violations, persecution, natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. These people are forced to leave their homes and often face protection challenges and lack of access to shelter, food, and other basic

services.

In urban areas in particular, refugees struggle with poverty, lack of psycho-social support and difficulties in normalising their legal status. Violence, abuse and exploitation against them often peak in the aftermath of new emergencies.

Finding durable solutions for the forcibly displaced is a challenge, but it's a must and needs to be addressed not by one country alone, but by all countries. I can't but keep repeating that it requires a global and inclusive partnership where solidarity and responsibility are shared by the entire international community and not only by a few host countries and donors.

Europe is and will remain a safe haven for those in need. Since 2015, EU Member States granted shelter to more than 1.9 million people. The EU is a leading international donor in situations of forced displacement. In 2018, the Commission allocated approximately 75% of its humanitarian budget, or more than €1.2 billion to projects that address the needs of forcibly displaced and local communities in around 40 countries.

Much is done. But, today more than ever, I am deeply worried about the plight of refugees and migrants having to make their way to Europe in an irregular and very dangerous way. The EESC continues to highlight the need for more safe and regular pathways to the EU. As much as I am worried about the situation of refugees and migrants, I am worried about the current political debate.

The European debate often focuses on the disadvantages brought about by immigration, but the opposite is true and rarely on the agenda. A flourishing EU society without safe and orderly, EU-supported labour migration is unthinkable.

Raising fences and building walls is not an option in a world of responsible and humane leaders. We need to work together because migration requires a coordinated European response involving ALL Member States.

The EU must have a forward-looking and comprehensive European migration and asylum policy based on solidarity, a key objective for the European Union. It is inadmissible that until today we have not found a way to review the Dublin regulation. We need to stop with irrational rationale and embrace ambitious pragmatism. I hope the new Commission and Parliament will show responsibility and deal with the problem without ambiguity.