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**"Migration needs both - humanity and clear rules"**

**EESC calls for a common European asylum and migration policy**

**Europe needs a truly common European asylum system with harmonised procedures throughout Europe. In the current complex situation, Europe needs to secure its borders in a European rather than a national effort while at the same time assisting asylum seekers outside the EU. Moreover, it has to put in place an effective immigration policy which is transparent, clearly outlining who will have a chance to immigrate and welcoming those newcomers by supporting their start in the respective EU Member State.**

These are some of many proposals the European Economic and Social Committee has included in four opinions\* on improving migration policy in Europe, which were adopted at the 512thplenary session on 10 December and which should feed into the *European Agenda on Migration*. The EESC also adopted a [Resolution on Refugees](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.news&itemCode=37786) calling for the development of immediate measures to address the root causes of the current refugee flow and for the development of safe humanitarian corridors for refugees from countries affected by wars. It also called for a special focus on the integration and inclusion of migrants into society and the labour market.

EC Vice-President Frans Timmermans referred to Member States: "*We need responsible leadership in the nations and we have to deal with differences in society, that's my call to EU leaders."*

**We need more responsibility, solidarity and more Europe**

The quarrels in Europe since flows of migrants have entered the Union, very drastically reminded EU leaders of the lack of a genuine common asylum policy. The EESC urges the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament to implement Article 67(2) and Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which lay down the conditions for the EU to create a European asylum policy. It is in the interest of all member states that a robust, solidarity based system of burden-sharing, especially a permanent, fair and binding system for allocating those seeking protection between all EU countries, is implemented. So far an agreement on the relocation of 160.000 refugees has been reached. The EESC considers that more ambition is needed. *"The resettlement mechanism evinces EU solidarity – permanent relocation needs to happen. Time of national selfishness is gone"*, said [Cristian Pirvulescu](http://memberspage.eesc.europa.eu/Detail.aspx?id=2021517&f=1&s=0&o1=0&o2=0&o3=0&ln=pirvulescu), while [Stefano Mallia](http://memberspage.eesc.europa.eu/Detail.aspx?id=2026925&f=1&s=0&o1=0&o2=0&o3=0&ln=mallia) (both rapporteurs) referred to those who are helping on the spot: *"The EU institutions need to better support these NGO's and the civil society."*

The EESC also reminds EU-Member States that one of the pillars of a functioning union is solidarity between all Member States which until recently has worked very well.

**Putting people-smugglers out of business**

It is in the European interest but it should also be an international effort to stop the brutal game of migrant-smugglers. *"The EU's action plan is a starting point which is welcomed by the EESC, however, it has to distinguish between migrants and refugees and also to refer to the Geneva Convention"*, said rapporteur [Brenda King](http://memberspage.eesc.europa.eu/Detail.aspx?id=2014448&f=1&s=0&o1=0&o2=0&o3=0&ln=king). It has also be accompanied by regulations on how the EU will protect and assist those who were smuggled. Moreover, due to the often socio-economic reasons of migration, a swift implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda should deserve special attention and be seen as a long-term solution improving the situation in the countries of origin.

**Common EU list of safe countries of origin**

For the EESC it is still too early to draft an inclusive list of safe Member States, however when the list will be drafted it is important to establish a common EU list of safe countries on the basis of common criteria set out in Directive 2013/32/EU. *"For the assessment of a country, specific, practical and precise indicators and criteria need to be used, also including sources from the UNHCR, EASO, CoE, ECHR and other human rights organisations",* said rapporteur [Jose Antonio Moreno Diaz](http://memberspage.eesc.europa.eu/Detail.aspx?id=2016005&f=1&s=0&o1=0&o2=0&o3=0&ln=moreno+diaz)*.* The EESC believes that the concept of safe country of origin should under no circumstances be applied in cases of infringement of press freedoms, undermining of political pluralism, or in countries where persecution takes place on the grounds of gender and/or sexual orientation, or of belonging to a national, ethnic, cultural or religious minority. The EESC, however, is concerned that a common list of safe countries will not lead to greater harmonisation as long as it will co-exist alongside national lists compiled by each member state.

**European leaders should support civil society initiatives**

Civil society plays a vital role in dealing with this crisis, for example by providing the first assistance to newcomers and by organising integration activities. The cost of non-integration greatly exceeds the cost of integration and civil society helps creating a cultural and social consensus on the need of integration. Therefore the EESC calls for an increase of financial and material support for NGOs and civil society organisations.

In addition, the EESC will start, before Christmas, a series of missions to several Member States especially concerned by migration flows in order to look into some of the challenges met by civil society organisations on the ground. It will look at best practices, problems and needs and in early 2016 will make a series of recommendations on how to help refugees and the organisations assisting them.

\*REX/457 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.rex-opinions.37220>

\*REX/452 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.rex-opinions.36581>

\*SOC/526 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-opinions.37296>

\*SOC/525 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-opinions.35966>

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*The European Economic and Social Committee is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The Committee has 350 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union. It represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.*

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