Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1652 (2004)[1]

Education of refugees and internally displaced persons

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The situation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is an abnormal and temporary state that must be resolved either by return, integration in the host country or resettlement in a third country. A decision on which course to take should be a matter of priority. Pending that decision, educational provision must be made for each eventuality.

2. For refugees and IDPs education is a basic essential, as also, depending on age, are further education and vocational training. What is at stake is the preparation of such persons for life in society, for employment and for democratic citizenship and this is relevant for all persons in that position. It is made more difficult and onerous by delay in the decision on whether to return or stay.

3. Education can also be a tool for protection and for promoting tolerance, peace and conflict resolution between opposing communities, for developing notions of intercultural understanding and dialogue, for contributing actively to peacekeeping operations and for combating the use of refugees as political hostages.

4. In addition to basic education, refugees and IDPs require specific psychological care, cultural orientation and language training. This calls for specially trained teachers and specific material.

5. Co-ordination is necessary between the host government (and the local community),governmental organisations (such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Unicef) and non-governmental organisations working with refugees and IDPs.

6. Considerable resources and sustained commitment by governments and donors are necessary for the education of refugees and IDPs. Such "soft sector" needs are too often ignored. More effective intervention at an early stage can reduce the long-term costs.

7. The Parliamentary Assembly has considered the situation of refugees and IDPs on several occasions. The present recommendation aims to reinforce attention on the problems and the priority of education.

8. Careful attention should, however, be paid to the very differing conditions of refugees and IDPs, in different European countries. Their concentration is highest in the South Caucasus and the Balkans. Education under post-conflict conditions in such areas should be pragmatic and is very different from that in safe and prosperous societies.

9. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member states to:

   9.1. give priority to the planning of adequate measures to ensure that access to education is available for refugees and IDPs pending the possibility of a durable solution of either voluntary repatriation or local integration;

   9.2. respect existing obligations for the provision of education for refugees and IDPs within the human rights framework and as indicated in the most recent UNHCR guidelines;

   9.3. change practices that dodge such international obligations, for example by defining what "authorised to stay" entails in terms of assessing educational assistance;

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1. (see Doc. 9996, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr R. Huseynov). Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 2 March 2004

9.4. make efforts to facilitate the integration of refugee and IDP children into the school system of the host country;

9.5. facilitate the provision of further education and vocational training for refugees and IDPs so as to reduce their dependence and to enable them to lead a normal life;

9.6. take account of education already acquired by refugees and IDPs;

9.7. meet the supplementary costs involved in the education and language teaching of refugees and IDPs so as to give them both a chance to return to a viable life in their own country and to remain in the host country;

9.8. train teachers for the specific education of refugees and IDPs.

10. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to:

10.1. examine models for teaching refugees and IDPs in key fields such as history, culture, civic education, religion and language;

10.2. integrate the education and training of refugees and IDPs into a new interdisciplinary project;

10.3. enter into partnership agreements with the European Union, UNHCR, Unicef and the World Health Organisation to tackle the problems of refugees and IDPs in specific areas of Europe in the fields of education, politics and social and health services (respectively).