Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Resolution 1971 (2014)[1]
Final version

Syrian refugees: how to organise and support international assistance?

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly dealt with the situation of Syrian refugees in its Resolution 1902 (2012) on the European response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, adopted in October 2012; in its current affairs debate, held in April 2013, on "Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq: how to organise and support international assistance?"; in its Resolution 1940 (2013) on the situation in the Middle East, adopted in June 2013; and in its Recommendation 2026 (2013) on the situation in Syria, adopted in October 2013.

2. According to estimates provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some 2.2 million Syrians have fled the country in order to request protection from neighbouring countries, including 1.1 million children. In Syria itself, according to the same sources, there are some 6.8 million people in need of humanitarian aid (including 3.1 million children) and 4.25 million internally displaced persons whose situation requires attention.

3. The Assembly underlines that the problems posed by the dramatic situation of refugees and displaced persons in Syria and in receiving countries can only be solved if there are prospects for peace and a political solution to the conflict, and reiterates its support for the international peace conference on Syria (Geneva II). In this dramatic context, it calls on all belligerents to stop fighting.

4. The international community has to put humanitarian aid in place on the basis of international humanitarian law and in accordance with the statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council of 2 October 2013.

5. The Assembly welcomes the start of the international peace conference on Syria in Montreux as well as the initiation of the process of dialogue between Syrians on the basis of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, supported by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 of 27 September 2013. The Assembly hopes that the outcome of the conference will be the transition from the logic of war to the logic of peace, achievement of stability and reconciliation, and the building of a new Syria in which all Syrians would feel comfortable.

6. The Assembly backs the appeal launched by Mr Chaloka Beyani, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, calling on the parties to the conflict to provide international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the necessary resources for helping the internally displaced persons, particularly women and children, and all vulnerable groups.

7. The Assembly reiterates its gratitude to the Turkish, Jordanian, Lebanese and Iraqi authorities for having taken in an enormous number of refugees, despite all the logistical problems this entails, and thanks the member and non-member States of the Council of Europe which have agreed to accommodate Syrian refugees in order to relieve some of the pressure on Syria's neighbours. These countries include Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden and Switzerland.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 29 January 2014 (6th Sitting) (see Doc. 13372, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Mr Jean-Marie Bockel; and Doc. 13403, opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Şaban Dişli). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 29 January 2014 (6th Sitting).

8. The Assembly appreciates the initiatives taken by member States to provide family reunion possibilities for Syrian refugees on their territory, notes the steps taken by the Swedish and Swiss authorities in this respect, and encourages other States to follow this example as far as possible.

9. The Assembly regrets, however, that member States have, in general, not adopted general policies on Syrian refugees and that most of them are continuing to assess Syrian asylum applications individually.

10. The Assembly notes that the situation in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon is becoming increasingly critical, as the responsibility of taking in large numbers of refugees combined with the economic downturn and unemployment are exacerbating existing tensions between local populations and the refugees.

11. The Assembly is deeply shocked by the extremely insecure living conditions for Syrian refugees, particularly in Lebanon. This country lacks the necessary infrastructure for receiving large numbers of refugees and as a result the refugees suffer from a lack of drinking water, food, clothing and housing. The Assembly takes this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of international organisations, particularly the UNHCR, in their efforts to nonetheless provide humanitarian assistance as best they can in difficult circumstances.

12. The Assembly would also like to thank the Turkish authorities and the Turkish Red Crescent for their work in setting up reception structures where the Syrian refugees can live in decent conditions and where the children can continue their studies. It fully supports the appeal for international aid launched by the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, calling on the international community to help his country cope with the increasing influx of refugees.

13. The situation of women and children, who account for the great majority of Syrian refugees, is of increasing concern. Children have been the first victims of the Syrian conflict, and they need emergency assistance. Most of them have problems with access to education and some are forced to work under conditions contrary to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, while many women suffer sexual and gender-based violence (rape, forced marriage and prostitution).

14. The Assembly also draws attention to the situation in the countries of North Africa which have taken in almost 15 000 Syrians and which are increasingly affected by the mass influx of refugees. The situation is also worrying in Egypt, which has taken in over 126 000 refugees, including Syrian refugees, some of whom are reportedly being expelled to third countries. There are also concerns in Egypt about refugee children being placed in administrative detention.

15. The Assembly asks the parties to the conflict to respect humanitarian law and to give humanitarian workers the authority to gain access to displaced persons in Syria, especially women, children and vulnerable groups, in order to provide them with the requisite assistance.

16. Consequently, the Assembly invites the member States of the Council of Europe, the observer States to the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly, and other States concerned by the situation of Syrian refugees to:

16.1. consider the possibility of providing temporary or international protection to Syrian refugees in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951 Geneva Convention) and allowing them to work during this period, following Turkey’s example;

16.2. implement the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement* and suspend the forcible return of Syrians to Syria and its neighbouring countries, in view of the difficulties which these countries are experiencing in managing the influx of these refugees;

16.3. ensure maximum access to their territory and to asylum procedures, provide appropriate reception and ensure that Syrian asylum seekers have access to efficient, swift and fair asylum procedures, avoiding so-called “transit visas”;

16.4. avoid administrative detention for Syrians entering the territory irregularly or without identity papers, and only implement such detention in exceptional circumstances as a last resort, after having considered all alternatives to detention;

16.5. facilitate issuing visas and residence permits for Syrians, including for education, work, humanitarian or family purposes;

16.6. simplify and expedite procedures for family reunion;

16.7. provide humanitarian organisations and NGOs with administrative and financial resources for assisting Syrian refugees, particularly in Lebanon;

16.8. show generosity and solidarity in admitting Syrian refugees to their territory, ensuring a balanced distribution amongst countries and providing the necessary infrastructure to guarantee decent accommodation, sanitary facilities, water, education, health care, food, etc.;

16.9. draw up a contingency plan in case of a further mass influx of Syrian refugees and provide additional development aid for Syria's neighbours to enable them to host refugees with dignity and respect for their human rights;

16.10. take steps to provide all vital resources, including food, clothing, medical aid and temporary shelter, for displaced persons in Syria and refugees in the neighbouring countries;

16.11. support a specific education programme for Syrian children in each host country and back the efforts to promote education for internally displaced Syrian children;

16.12. ensure proper protection for women and girls by actively involving Syrian female refugees in management and decision making inside the camps, preventing child and forced marriages, and providing safe and accessible sanitary facilities and psychological support for traumatised women and children;

16.13. provide specific support for internally displaced persons living in deplorable hygiene conditions;

16.14. establish a resettlement programme from the countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees, possibly with the help of the Council of Europe Development Bank;

16.15. ask the Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank to consider a donation from the selective trust account in order to step up the action of the UNHCR in favour of Syrian refugees;

16.16. ensure that the humanitarian consequences of the Syrian conflict, both in Syria and in the neighbouring countries, including the need for urgent international assistance, are put as a priority on the agenda of the international peace conference on Syria (Geneva II).

17. The Assembly invites the member States of the European Union to:

17.1. bring into effect, as necessary, Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof;

17.2. support, as a form of solidarity and responsibility sharing, the European Union countries receiving the largest numbers of Syrian refugees, and reinforce their reception capacities.

18. The Assembly appeals to all the neighbouring countries of Syria to open, or keep open, their borders for refugees fleeing from Syria.