



Resolution 1972 (2014)¹

Final version

Ensuring that migrants are a benefit for European host societies

Parliamentary Assembly

1. One of the consequences of the economic crisis which struck in 2008 is that many European States have taken a hard look at migration, leading to debates that have not always been based on fact but rather more on fears and prejudices.
2. While some legitimate concerns have been raised at the highest political levels about Europe's experience of multiculturalism, particularly in relation to second generation migrants, the debate should focus more on how to successfully integrate migrants and ensure that the benefits of migration are felt by the host societies, the countries of origin and the migrants themselves.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly is concerned that all too often migrants are unfairly portrayed as being a burden on public finances and a threat to economic prosperity and social cohesion in host societies. This view has been exacerbated by the economic crisis and widespread austerity measures. Worryingly, this context has led to an increasingly hostile environment and public discourse on immigration in many Council of Europe member States.
4. Both the media and politicians have played a role in allowing misconceptions about migrants to take hold in many member States. While in some instances this has been a result of passivity, in others it has been deliberate. The opinions of far-right extremist and neo-Nazi groups are increasingly finding their way into mainstream politics, either through politicians with significant public support, or when the rhetoric of these groups is taken up by mainstream parties.
5. The Assembly considers that it is essential to portray an honest picture of the benefits that migrants bring to member States. There must be a clear understanding that States have a choice as to whether migrants become more of a benefit or more of a burden. This choice will depend on the steps member States take in terms of the migrants they accept in their territory and their commitment to integration, which has to be a two-way process involving both migrants and the host society.
6. There are many ways in which migrants bring benefits to host countries. On the economic front, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has clearly shown that, overall, they are not a major burden for public finances. Furthermore, the European Commission has found that mobile European Union citizens are not a burden on national social security systems.
7. Migrants make an enormous contribution to the labour market, filling shortages which constrain growth. They find themselves in the position of having to accept jobs which many Europeans shun because they are low paid, insecure, dangerous and difficult. In some countries, whole sectors of the economy would come to a halt without migrants, for example construction, seasonal agriculture, tourism, health services or domestic services. Their contribution as entrepreneurs, employing 2.4% of the total employed population in OECD

1. *Assembly debate* on 29 January 2014 (6th Sitting) (see [Doc. 13367](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Athina Kyriakidou). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 29 January 2014 (6th Sitting).



countries, is substantial. In addition, their links with foreign markets provide new outlets for business growth, and the contribution that international students make through spending and then providing a pool of highly qualified labour with the requisite language skills should not be underestimated.

8. Europe is ageing and the working age population in the European Union is set to fall by 10.5% by the year 2050. Current fertility rates are also low and below the replacement level in many European countries. For example, they stand at 1.74 children per woman in Armenia, 1.42 in Germany and 1.54 in Russia. It has been projected that Europe will need between 40 and 60 million immigrant workers by 2050 to sustain its level of prosperity and welfare.

9. The benefits of migration cannot only be measured in terms of economics and demography. Migrants can be a source of cultural enrichment through literature, film, art, sports, food and fashion, and potentially increase intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

10. The Assembly considers that member States should do more to ensure that the benefits that migrants can bring are maximised. More specifically, the Assembly recommends that member States:

10.1. challenge the misconceptions that exist about migrants, and in particular those that portray them as being a burden on public finances and a threat to economic prosperity and social cohesion. They should do this by:

10.1.1. providing a fair and accurate portrayal of the fiscal and other impact of migrants in terms of labour, entrepreneurialism, demography, higher education, culture and co-development;

10.1.2. encouraging the media to use impartial and accurate information and research, proper terminology and less emotive language when reporting on the situation of migrants and migration;

10.1.3. urging politicians to show responsibility in the debate on migrants and migration and not allowing extremist views and terminology to become part of mainstream discourse. Furthermore, politicians should be encouraged to lead the public debate away from misconceptions which damage migrants and their prospects for integration;

10.1.4. encouraging further research and data collection on the impact of migration in order to provide an evidence-based approach to the issue;

10.2. ensure that the benefits of migrants and migration are maximised, through the integration of migrants as part of a two-way process, *inter alia* by:

10.2.1. promoting their economic participation through the removal of legal and other barriers, such as the non-recognition of qualifications, which restrict their participation in the labour market, whether as employed or self-employed workers or entrepreneurs;

10.2.2. increasing their education levels and achievements so that they reflect more closely those of the total population;

10.2.3. combating discrimination and promoting equality, taking into account the recommendations of the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies, such as the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights and the No Hate Speech Movement of the Council of Europe;

10.2.4. facilitating their democratic participation, including through granting nationality/citizenship and the right to vote, in particular at local level, in accordance with the Council of Europe's Convention on Nationality (ETS No. 166) and the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144);

10.2.5. promoting the advantages of diversity resulting from migration and integration, considering migrants as a resource for local economic, social and cultural development, and not only as vulnerable groups in need of welfare support and services, or a threat to social cohesion;

10.2.6. encouraging their sense of belonging by allowing dual citizenship, particularly for those in mixed marriages and for their children;

10.2.7. ensuring that higher education remains attractive to overseas students by facilitating an efficient and straightforward visa process;

10.3. recognising that integration for the most part takes place at the local level, make use of the experience of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Intercultural Cities Programme including its Intercultural Cities Index;

10.4. ensure that labour immigration policies match realistic labour market needs and recognise that some avenues of immigration cannot be regulated to the same extent as others without conflicting with human rights and humanitarian obligations. This is particularly the case with regard to refugees and asylum seekers and also with family reunification policies.

11. The Assembly recognises that large-scale movements of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees place responsibilities and burdens on southern Mediterranean States, in particular when they do not have the necessary infrastructure or economic resources to effectively deal with them. The Assembly calls on member States to help these countries to better meet their human rights obligations when handling migrants' needs and prevent misconceptions about migrants and the spread of xenophobic rhetoric in public discourse.