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Integration of refugees in times of critical pressure: learning from recent experience and examples of best practice

Report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
Rapporteur: Ms Susanna HUOVINEN, Finland, Socialist Group

Summary

As the pressure increases on those countries receiving the greatest numbers of asylum applicants and refugees, this situation risks undermining European political solidarity and efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs of refugees. The migrant and refugee crisis has provoked responses amongst public opinion that include rejection and fear, with a widespread reluctance to receive additional refugees.

On the other hand, many countries have made enormous efforts to respond to the challenge, welcome the refugees and begin the process of integrating them into society. These examples show how States can cope with even very large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in ways that benefit both the new arrivals and the host societies – provided there is clear political will, good communication of policy and effective mobilisation of administrative and social resources.

This report provides an overview of different national approaches to the integration of migrants in Council of Europe member States. It puts emphasis on good practices which can be broadly used to succeed in engaging refugees in the daily economic, social and cultural life of host communities. This is based on an understanding of the situation of the refugees and their cultural backgrounds, whilst also respecting the fundamental values and everyday lifestyles of host societies.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13903, Reference 4169 of 25 January 2016.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. During 2015, the mass arrival of refugees in western Europe via Turkey, Greece and the western Balkans route, combined with the continuous inflow via Italy, brought to its climax a major increase of the number of refugees and migrants. This crisis provoked responses amongst public opinion that include rejection and fear, with a widespread reluctance to receive additional refugees, putting increasing pressure on those countries receiving the greatest numbers of asylum applicants and refugees.
2. Certain States which have managed the reception of particularly high numbers of refugees (Germany and Sweden, for instance) have accrued valuable experience in integrating these new arrivals. This, as well as experiences gained also in countries receiving fewer refugees, could be shared with others, thereby encouraging greater solidarity and more equitable sharing of responsibilities.
3. The integration of refugees is a long and complicated process, requiring durable commitment on the part of both the refugees and the authorities, including the continuing engagement of civil society. If policy no longer promotes integration and the public mood towards refugees is one of mistrust and hostility, they risk becoming isolated, increasingly alienated and at risk of radicalisation.
4. Effective integration is based on respect for the fundamental values of the host society, including constitutional principles and cultural practices. It engages the refugees in the daily economic, social and cultural life of the host community and it reflects understanding of and respect for the situation of the refugees and their cultural backgrounds. It is an ongoing process rather than a final destination, depending on constructive tripartite engagement between the authorities, the host community (especially civil society) and the refugees.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly recognises that while requiring respect for the basic values of the host society, integration of migrants means neither assimilation – whereby newcomers adopt the host societies' culture, values and traditions in place of their own – nor a multi-culturalism of native-born and refugee or migrant communities living separate existences according to their original cultures, values and traditions.
6. Recalling its [Resolution 2137 \(2016\)](#) on the impact of European population dynamics on migration policies, and referring to Resolution ... (2017) on migration as an opportunity for European development, especially with respect to the employment of migrants, the Assembly encourages the Council of Europe member and observer States and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly to ensure the successful integration of refugees by:
 - 6.1. recognising that increased levels of migration are a permanent characteristic of today's Europe and that, if well managed, the integration of refugees is a means of contributing to demographic renewal, the acquisition of new competencies and the cultural diversity and enrichment of host societies;
 - 6.2. urging politicians to recognise that refugees are protected under international and European Union law and therefore it is in the interest of the host country for them to be effectively integrated into society;
 - 6.3. promoting the integration of refugees as a public good worth investing in;
 - 6.4. increasing efficiency and reducing the length of the processing of asylum applications and optimising the territorial distribution of asylum seekers as preconditions for public confidence and for the presence in the territory of productive, well-integrated refugees, thus helping to avoid alienation or radicalisation of refugees and political discontent in the country;
 - 6.5. ensuring that unaccompanied minors receive the necessary legal and social assistance in completing their asylum applications, and ensuring that the asylum applications of minors who have lived in the host country for a considerable length of time are completed when they reach the age of majority;
 - 6.6. with respect to national policies:
 - 6.6.1. reviewing national legislation and its implementation with a view to facilitating the integration process and eliminating bureaucratic obstacles;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 25 April 2017.

- 6.6.2. ensuring effective co-ordination and co-operation between the different State agencies, regional and local authorities and non-governmental organisations involved in integration projects;
- 6.6.3. providing for effective legal and political accountability for integration processes at national and local levels;
- 6.6.4. considering the introduction, if not yet done, of a special identity card upon registration to give the authorities access to all information on a person which is relevant for the integration process;
- 6.6.5. introducing different elements aimed at facilitating integration at the earliest stages of the asylum determination procedure, including psychological trauma support;
- 6.6.6. ensuring that expenditure and programmes which benefit migrants do not introduce real or perceived reductions in investment and services for resident populations, in particular with respect to other disadvantaged groups in the country;
- 6.6.7. creating an environment and conditions to promote activities of non-governmental organisations and civic initiatives aimed at increased integration of refugees and migrants and encouraging the involvement of the local population;
- 6.6.8. taking into account that consultation and participation of both migrants and civil society in the host country in decision making and the implementation of integration programmes allows policies to be better adapted to specific circumstances at national, regional and local levels, and promotes a sense of shared responsibility;
- 6.6.9. ensuring that multi-media communication and information campaigns are organised, targeting both residents and migrants, with the aim of providing clear and informative guidelines and a positive general environment for all;
- 6.7. with respect to the settlement of migrants in the host country:
 - 6.7.1. ensuring that (re)location of migrants is carried out with regard to the capacities and opportunities of the places of settlement, including educational and labour market possibilities, as well as to the needs of the migrants concerned and their family circumstances;
 - 6.7.2. providing adult migrants with the necessary language and vocational training courses as well as a level of civic instruction which provides orientations for everyday life in the country;
 - 6.7.3. providing children with immediate access to appropriate education or day care, where possible including them in mainstream educational structures, provided allowances are made to minimise language and cultural barriers;
 - 6.7.4. understanding that family reunification is an integral part of successful integration and should thus not be submitted to additional obstacles, suspensions or other measures causing delays in reunification;
 - 6.7.5. protecting and assisting particularly vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, including by providing the latter with individual guardianship and follow-up into adulthood;
 - 6.7.6. ensuring proper resources for social and health care services for migrants, as well as making good use of existing youth, cultural and sports initiatives that foster inclusiveness;
 - 6.7.7. making use of platforms for international dialogue and co-operation, for exchange of information and experience, such as the Council of Europe's Intercultural cities programme, with a view to taking advantage of best practices and models.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Susanna Huovinen, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The present report had its origins in the extraordinary circumstances of autumn 2015, when arrivals of refugees³ into western Europe via Turkey, Greece and the Western Balkans route were at their peak. The motion recalled that the crisis had provoked responses amongst public opinion that include rejection and fear, with a widespread reluctance to receive additional refugees. As the pressure increases on those countries receiving the greatest numbers of asylum applicants and refugees, this situation risks undermining European political solidarity and efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs of refugees. It also noted that States which had already received high numbers of refugees had accrued valuable experience in integrating these new arrivals. Sharing these experiences could encourage greater solidarity and more equitable burden-sharing. The motion therefore asked the Parliamentary Assembly to study such situations, with a view to making recommendations to member States and the Committee of Ministers.

2. Although the situation in Greece, which now hosts around 63 000 refugees and continues to receive a few new arrivals, and in Italy, which received over 180 000 arrivals in 2016, remain of concern, that in most western European countries has stabilised, with the level of arrivals drastically reduced since spring 2016 as a result of the European Union–Turkey deal. The migrant and refugee crisis nevertheless remains an issue of acute political controversy at both domestic and European levels and a source of great tension between States. Refugees continue to be demonised, with the result that essential responsibility-sharing mechanisms such as relocation and resettlement have proved unsatisfactory and European solidarity has been placed under extreme strain.

3. Despite the public anxiety and hostility from certain political quarters, many countries have made impressive efforts to respond to the challenge, welcome the refugees and begin the process of integrating them into society. These examples show how States can cope with even very large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in ways that benefit both the new arrivals and the host societies – provided there is clear political will, good communication of policy and effective mobilisation and co-ordination of administrative and social resources. The present report will examine some of these situations as a basis for making policy recommendations for action at both domestic and European levels.

4. For the Council of Europe and other international organisations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), integration does not mean either assimilation, whereby newcomers adopt the host societies' culture, values and traditions in place of their own; or a multi-culturalism of native-born and refugee or migrant communities living separate, parallel existences according to their original cultures, values and traditions. Effective integration is based on respect for the fundamental values of the host society, including constitutional principles and cultural norms; it engages the refugees in the daily economic, social and cultural life of the host community; and it reflects understanding of and respect for the situation of the refugees and their cultural backgrounds. It is an ongoing process rather than a final destination, depending on constructive tripartite engagement between the authorities, the host community (especially civil society) and the refugees.

5. During the preparation of this report, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons held a hearing with Mr Jean-Christophe Dumont from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁴ and the Sub-committee on Integration organised a conference in Berlin on Germany's experience of the integration of refugees and migrants.⁵ After considering the options for good examples of best practice in both a large and a small member State with great differences in numbers of arrivals, I decided to conduct fact-finding visits to Germany and Portugal.⁶ I also organised a hearing in the Finnish Parliament on the situation in my country. I would like to thank all those involved for their invaluable contributions.

3. According to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the UNHCR's Statute, refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalised violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. The term "migrant" is used in this report where the situation addressed may include people who do not fall into this definition.

4. In his presentation, Mr Dumont referred to a particularly useful OECD publication entitled "Making Integration Work: Refugees and Others in Need of Protection", which sets out 10 concise "lessons" for policy makers, as well as numerous examples of good practice, some of which are mentioned in this report.

5. See document AS/Mig/Inf (2016) 26 Rev 4 for the programme of the conference.

6. See documents AS/Mig (2016) 39 final and AS/Mig (2017) 4 final respectively for the programmes of these visits.

6. In addition, a questionnaire on national integration policies was circulated through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), to which 36 countries responded. The substantial information thus obtained has been compiled in an information document, which will certainly prove its usefulness well beyond the present report as a “compendium” and reference for further study; in this report I have pointed to just a few of the examples provided by the respondents.⁷

2. National policies

2.1. The political environment

7. Since under international law refugees can only be removed from the country under exceptional circumstances and may remain for years, decades or even indefinitely, it is clearly in the interest of the host country for refugees to be effectively integrated into society. Politicians must recognise this and seek to shape public opinion in support of integration as a public good worth investing in.⁸

8. If politicians do not show leadership by advocating the feasibility and desirability of integrating refugees, and if the general population is not persuaded, or if politicians fail to put in place an appropriate legislative and policy framework and adequate resources, then integration cannot succeed. In this respect, German Chancellor Merkel’s famous statement, “We can manage this”, reassured many Germans that the national authorities were both aware of the scope of the challenge and confident in their ability to respond to it.

9. To maintain public support, the authorities should balance expenditure on integration of refugees against the needs of other disadvantaged groups. In Baden-Württemberg, for example, a newly elected administration closed the regional ministry for migration and integration on the grounds that it was discriminatory towards other groups. In Germany generally, the authorities have had to give reassurances to the public that the country’s considerable expenditure on refugees has neither given rise to budgetary deficits, nor led to cuts in other areas. In Portugal, the “One-stop shop” centres for reception and integration of refugees and migrants were inspired by the existing “Citizens’ shops” which provide equivalent services for residents in Portugal.

10. Public confidence in the authorities’ capacity to administer an effective asylum and integration system also depends on manifest delivery of concrete results, starting with prompt and orderly registration and accommodation of asylum seekers. Just as an effective asylum and integration system can create a virtuous circle of public confidence, productive, well-integrated refugees and political consensus, so can a poorly managed system fall into a vicious circle of public anxiety, alienated or even radicalised refugees and political discontent and even extremism. Given the number of refugees who arrived in 2015 and 2016, and the ongoing crises and conflicts in refugee-producing countries, integration of refugees will remain a high-stakes challenge for the foreseeable future.

11. Politicians must not indulge in hate speech against refugees. National law and policy should take appropriate action against such hate speech in all contexts, including statements by the media. In this respect, the work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is very important, both its country-specific monitoring and its general policy recommendations, notably No. 5 on combating racism and intolerance against Muslims, No. 15 on combating hate speech and No. 16 on safeguarding irregularly present migrants from discrimination. The joint Council of Europe–European Union programme “Communication for Integration” (C4i), active in 11 European cities, targets prejudices, rumours and

7. Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada (observer), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, United Kingdom.

8. In the *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy* case of 23 February 2012, the European Court on Human Rights ruled that Somali and Eritrean migrants travelling from Libya, intercepted at sea by the Italian authorities and sent back to Libya, had been subjected to collective expulsion prohibited by Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 46), and that the applicants had fallen within the jurisdiction of Italy for the purposes of Article 1 of the Convention (ETS No. 5) (obligation to respect human rights). The Court also found a violation of Article 3 of the Convention (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) because the applicants had been exposed to the risk of ill-treatment in Libya and of repatriation to Somalia or Eritrea. The case of *Ilias and Ahmed v. Hungary* concerned the border-zone detention for 23 days of two Bangladeshi asylum seekers as well as their removal from Hungary to Serbia. On 14 March 2017, the Court held that there had been a violation of Articles 5.1 and 5.4 (right to liberty and security) because the applicants’ confinement in the Röszke border-zone had amounted to detention without any reasoned decision, violation of Article 13 (right to an effective remedy) and violation of Article 3 since the applicants’ expulsion to Serbia exposed them to a real risk of being subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment.

stereotypes concerning refugees and migrants by using viral information techniques to provide evidence-based answers to common misconceptions, thanks to the active participation of citizens as “anti-rumour agents”.⁹ Not to be forgotten either is the Parliamentary Assembly’s own campaign launched by its President, “No Hate no Fear” aimed at decoupling fears caused by terrorism from mistrust or hatred towards foreigners.

12. In Portugal, multi-media public-awareness campaigns are organised around the authorities’ action, and participative programmes such as “Mentores para migrantes” (Mentors for migrants) encourage public involvement. The National Immigration Support centre in Lisbon runs a documentation centre on immigration, intercultural education and fighting racism and discrimination and produces hand-outs and information to promote “a more tolerant and welcoming society”.

2.2. The national administrative context

13. Each country has its own administrative structure. In any administrative system, however, it is crucial that different agencies co-operate and co-ordinate their work, to ensure efficient flows of information, use of expertise, co-ordination of activities and avoidance of wasteful duplication. Effective legal and political accountability is also important. In the Scandinavian countries, asylum seekers receive a personal identification number used in all administrative registers, giving access to information on, for example, the person’s residence status, education, employment and participation in programmes. To similar effect, all asylum seekers in Germany are given a special ID card upon registration which gives the authorities access to information on the person’s health, educational background and professional experience. The authorities should also be alert to the possibility of unco-ordinated duplication of activities due to over-enthusiasm on the part of different agencies, which has been the case in Germany and Finland for example.

14. In many cases, existing structures can form the basis for administrative action, since most if not all of the basic services necessary to the integration of refugees will already be in place for members of the general population. They may, however, need adaptation and additional resources. In countries with relatively little experience of hosting refugees, or which are suddenly faced with unexpectedly high numbers of arrivals, it may be necessary to consider the creation of new structures. One should bear in mind the Finnish experience: whilst the integration model had worked well with low numbers of asylum seekers, the dramatic increase in 2015 had somewhat overwhelmed the various authorities, leading to their actions becoming fragmented and the system inflexible for people with complex problems.

15. An increasing number of national and local authorities have established specific offices or action plans. Germany, for example, has a Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, which the government is now considering transforming into a separate ministry. In addition, a special “social cohesion and integration unit” was established in the Federal Ministry of the Interior in February 2016. In May 2016, the city of Berlin adopted a new, comprehensive “Master Plan on Integration and Security”; on a more detailed level, the police in the Neukölln district of Berlin have created a special unit to support the integration of refugees and migrants, also intended as a confidence-building measure. As early as 2007, Bergen, Norway had established an action plan entitled “Everybody’s Responsibility”, which contributes to the city’s implementation of Norway’s 2003 Introduction Act, intended to enhance newly arrived migrants’ participation in working and social life and increase their financial independence. In Portugal, three National Immigrant Support Centres were established in Lisbon and Porto in 2004 and in 2009 in Faro, in which intercultural mediators play a prominent role. By contrast, the municipal authorities in Helsinki, Finland, bemoaned the lack of a central authority responsible for helping refugees find their identities and places in Finnish society.

16. Equally important in this context is cross-functional co-operation. Austria has an Advisory Committee on Integration co-ordinated by the Interior Ministry and attended by all stakeholders concerned. In 2015, in Flanders, a Ministerial Committee for the Refugee and Asylum Crisis was established. Cyprus has founded a cross-functional Integration Task Force to jointly look into different aspects of migration and asylum. In the Czech Republic, the Refugees Facilities Administration has the same function. Estonia has a Co-ordination Council of Refugee Policy and Finland has a cross-functional Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO). Portugal’s Council for Migration is a body that comments on any migration-related laws and includes the 10 largest migrant communities and 48 different partners. Any migration-related draft law in Portugal must pass through the Council.

9. For further information, see <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/c4i>.

3. Local and regional administration

17. Whilst status determination and legislation, for example, are usually national responsibilities, the burden of providing services falls mainly on local authorities. It is therefore essential that local and regional views are taken fully into account when designing and implementing national policy, and sufficient resources made available to local and regional authorities to ensure that they can fulfil their responsibilities effectively. In September 2015, at the height of the refugee crisis, Germany, despite rigorous domestic budgetary austerity, made an additional €600 million available from the federal to the regional budgets; and in January 2016, the Federal Chancellor organised a conference with the regions to agree on a national integration plan, which led to an extra €9.3 billion of federal support to the regions and municipalities.

18. Where large numbers of refugees arrive in a country in a short period, it may be necessary to allocate them to different regions, so as to spread the financial and administrative burden. Experience has shown, however, that various factors may drive refugees and asylum seekers to relocate within the country. These include notably separation from other family members or from settled communities of the same nationality, ethnicity, language or religion, and relative unavailability of work in the locality. Where measures are taken to enforce regional allocation, such as restricting access to benefits and services in other regions, this may have a negative impact on integration outcomes, including employment rates. The consequences of imbalances in the regional distribution of refugees and asylum seekers can be partly addressed through varying the levels of financial support provided to the regions by the national authorities. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the importance of avoiding segregation between residential areas and ghettoisation, which in the worst case can halt or even reverse the impact of successful integration schemes.

19. For example, the exemplary efficiency of the Saarland authorities in processing asylum seekers from arrival to accommodation in local communities has attracted others from elsewhere in Germany. I also heard that in Berlin-Brandenburg, the city of Berlin had job opportunities but a shortage of housing. Adjacent Brandenburg had spare housing capacity but had done little to help asylum seekers find work as, for example, carers or taxi drivers. According to the OECD, local labour market conditions are a crucial determinant of refugees' long-term employment rates and integration in general, so it is important to avoid placing new arrivals in areas with cheap housing but few job opportunities. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Portugal and Sweden are amongst the few countries that take local employment prospects into account in their dispersal schemes.

20. The Portuguese context is quite different from that of other countries examined for this report, mainly on account of the difference in scale of migration into the country. In February 2017, 1 063 migrants had been relocated, with no transition through reception centres in the country but immediate placement in local accommodation and housing. The National Support Centres (CNAIs) are linked to a network of 49 Local Immigrant Integration Support Centres which, in partnership with so far 89 municipalities, provide accommodation, local information services and direct access to the national network.

21. I would also like to mention the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme. Although its overall scope extends beyond integration of refugees, it has frequently focussed on action in this field by municipal authorities. I would encourage the reader to consult, for example, the report on the Seminar on Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion, which took place in Brussels on 12 and 13 September 2016; the report on the Study Visit on Refugee Inclusion to Bergen (Norway) on 9 and 10 June 2016; the summary of the 1st Portuguese Intercultural Cities Network Workshop on "The Question of Refugees" on 26 January 2016; or the report of the Intercultural Cities' Network Seminar in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) on 29 and 30 October 2015.¹⁰

4. Participative approaches on both sides

4.1. The role of civil society

22. Alongside public authorities, civil society has a crucial role to play, from providing basic services such as food, shelter and medical care at the moment of arrival, to assisting with administrative and legal procedures during and after status determination, to integration projects such as language and vocational training and social/cultural activities, and even to anti-radicalisation programmes (see below). Civil society has the advantage of flexibility, creativity and adaptability, and refugees may feel more confident in turning to civil society organisations than to the authorities for assistance in certain areas. The role of civil society should

10. For these and other documents of the Inter-cultural Cities Programme, see the website: www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/home.

therefore be recognised, encouraged and where necessary supported by the authorities, since it may involve activities that would be difficult for the authorities themselves to undertake. However, the rules for sharing responsibility must be clear. The authorities should work together with civil society in order to look for synergies. Any attempts at trying to give civil society tasks beyond their competence and resources should be avoided.

23. One drawback to the spontaneity and independence of civil society projects can be a lack of co-ordination, with the risk of duplication and missed synergies with both other civil society actors and the authorities. This is one area where the authorities, especially at local level, can contribute. In the Neukölln district of Berlin, for example, the municipality established a co-ordination office for refugees in June 2015, in order to acquire a comprehensive overview of the work of volunteers, start-ups and civil society organisations, and better support their work. In the Czech Republic, there are regular meetings between the ministries and civil society in order to ensure the implementation of necessary measures and their proper co-ordination. In Portugal, the ethnic diversity of Portuguese residents and a real awareness of the need to counter demographic decline reduces the reactions of hostility and mistrust of new arrivals. Publicly organised voluntary mentoring schemes also encourage individual citizens to take on an active role in helping refugees to integrate and thereby feel some responsibility for their well-being.

24. In many countries, the church also plays an important role in the integration process, in particular with regard to early reception and accommodation. The church and its often very active community can provide low threshold and easy-access services directly to refugees often regardless of the refugees' religion. In Armenia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary and the United Kingdom, the church has been actively involved in the integration of refugees at various levels.

4.2. The need to involve the refugees themselves and to develop individualised approaches

25. No one can understand refugees' integration needs better than refugees themselves, yet refugees' are not always consulted when integration policy is formulated, nor are their preferences and individual needs fully taken into account when implemented.¹¹ Integration policy can only achieve its full potential if it engages with refugees not as passive recipients, "to be integrated", but as independent, dynamic actors in themselves to recover their previous dignity and autonomy.

26. Refugees have unique experiences, qualities and needs. A "one size fits all" approach to integration risks failing to meet the requirements of many refugees. This does not mean reinventing the integration wheel for every individual, but that there should be scope for adaptation to their specific circumstances. The Scandinavian countries, for example, provide mostly tailor-made schemes that can last from two to three years depending on the individual's needs. In Belgium, the Flemish government has approved a Horizontal Integration Policy Plan for 2016-2019 to reduce the ethnic gap and improve the social status of refugees through four strategic objectives: promotion of social and economic participation; improving the knowledge of Dutch of non-native speakers; enhancing mutual respect; and achieving an aligned, substantiated and broadly supported integration policy. The point of departure for the plan is that integration is seen as a two-way process with responsibilities for both individuals and institutions.

27. In Bergen, Norway, the "Second Chance" programme provides those refugees who did not complete the vocational, social and language training within the normal two-year period, with tailor-made plans focusing especially on language skills and integration into the labour market. 80% of those enrolled on the programme are women with care-giving responsibilities. Norwegian policy generally pays particular attention to low-skilled refugees so as to provide them with the basic skills necessary to function, through language training and courses on the country's society and culture. At the other end of the educational spectrum, the German NGO Kiron Higher Education allows refugee students to register and study online, accumulate course credits and ultimately graduate from one of its 25 participating universities. The ReDI School for Digital Integration in Berlin provides computer programming courses for refugees and assists them in presenting their work to potential employers, many of which have demonstrated great interest in and support for its activities.

28. Associations representing refugees can play an important part in raising societal awareness of the situation of their members. The Greek NGO Solomon publishes an online magazine in which migrants, refugees and native Greeks can express their views on a wide range of issues of social interest. Mentorship projects can perform a similar function: the "Start with a Friend" online platform in Berlin, for example, brings

11. In 2012, the King Baudouin Foundation and the Migration Policy Group (Brussels) published the results of a survey on "[How Immigrants Experience Immigration in 15 European cities](#)", which contains much revealing information on the priorities, hopes and aspirations of immigrants seeking to integrate into their host communities.

together refugees and local mentors with the aim of learning from one another, developing a long-term commitment and ideally, a friendship, as well as providing advice and assistance on practical matters. The Greek Forum for Refugees has organised a successful meeting with members of the far-right Golden Dawn party, known for its anti-refugee and anti-migrant views, with the aim of creating dialogue between the refugee and host communities.

29. The sooner a refugee feels accepted into the host country, constructively engaged with the national authorities after registration and asylum application, and protected from *refoulement* after positive status determination, the sooner s/he has material and psychological foundations for social and economic activities. Reception, registration and especially status determination may, however, take some time to complete. Lengthy delays in status determination are destabilising for refugees and undermine integration efforts. Many countries therefore provide access to various forms of integration measures either from a very early stage, even before status is determined, or after a certain delay in status determination.

5. Creating sustainable frameworks for integration

5.1. Psychological, social and health care support

30. Many refugees arriving in Europe have suffered a challenging journey and may be heavily traumatised by their experiences of conflict and of fleeing their homes and leaving their families behind. It is thus important to have in place proper social and health care facilities and personnel for the early identification of psychological problems. Failure to address such problems may have wide-ranging consequences, affecting, for example, employment, language-learning, education and interaction with the authorities. Nevertheless, the OECD reports that few countries screen for mental health problems, a notable exception being Sweden, where the issue is addressed during routine medical checks. In several countries, specialised NGOs work with refugees, such as Hemayat in Austria, the Cross-Cultural Psychological Consultancy in Denmark, the Centre for Torture Survivors in Finland and Freedom from Torture in the United Kingdom. Belgium also has initiated a project funding six full-time psychologists deployed in School Counselling Centres in six regions to provide help for refugee children with trauma issues. Member States should ensure that health and social services are properly equipped with staff with a psychological education in order to spot specific needs and problems as early as possible.

5.2. Accommodation

31. Regardless of integration policy, all newly arrived refugees have a right to essential services such as suitable accommodation, health care and psychosocial support; failure to meet these needs may put the authorities in breach of their legal obligations. Provision of suitable accommodation is also important, however, from the perspective of integration. Where sudden, large numbers of arrivals have left the authorities with no choice but to house refugees and asylum seekers in mass facilities, they should be transferred to accommodation in residential areas at the earliest opportunity. This allows stabilisation and normalisation of their living conditions, the possibility to develop more individualised and autonomous daily routines – important for rebuilding family life, dignity and self-esteem – and settled contact with host communities.

32. Various initiatives seek to find refugees accommodation in the homes of members of the host community: in France, the online “Comme à la Maison” platform, created by the NGO Singa, allows individuals to offer refugees temporary accommodation in their homes and thereby unmatched insight into and engagement with the host community; and in the Neukölln district of Berlin, another social start-up, “Refugees Welcome”, performs a similar role. Antwerp in Belgium has a system called “Cohousing Curant” to help young newcomers share accommodation. Hungarian NGOs and churches have also introduced projects that allow for temporary rent-free housing combined with social work. Since 2007, the United Kingdom Home Office has granted integration loans to recognised refugees. The loans can be used for housing.

5.3. Schooling and early education

33. The integration of children often takes place in school, but early childhood education provided by day-care centres forms an excellent platform for the integration of children. In a safe day-care environment, children can learn the language of the host country, interact with other children and adults and learn skills adjusted to the host country’s customs and traditions. It also allows parents to focus more on their own integration procedure and to find jobs and other civic activities. In the National Action Plan for implementation of the National Strategy for Integration of Refugees and Foreigners in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, there is specific mention of the establishment of day-care centres for children of preschool age,

run by the community, which will enable mothers or single parents to become part of the labour market. The Flemish government in Belgium has set up specific measures to enhance children's participation in preschool activities. Armenia, Liechtenstein and Lithuania also have special provisions for ensuring refugee children's access to day care. In Finland, the City of Helsinki uses its wide network of public playgrounds and family centres to promote the "Kotoklubi Kaneli". This is a project aimed at teaching small children Finnish through play, songs, functional activities and arts using the method of "toisto", namely repetition.

5.4. Family reunification

34. For those refugees who arrive separated from their families, their most urgent preoccupation is to ensure their relatives' safety and reunite the family in the host country. Indeed, until this has taken place, the refugee may be distracted and lack the peace of mind necessary to engage with other integration measures. It is therefore important that national law and policy on family reunification are clear, properly explained and efficiently administered. Flexible, innovative solutions to practical problems such as proving relationships or attending application and interview appointments should be found. Family reunification policy should also take a broad, inclusive approach to the definition of family, including not only, for example, minor children or parents, but also relatives such as adult siblings and dependent elderly parents where to exclude them would create impossible dilemmas for family members otherwise entitled to benefit from family reunification.

35. Germany's decision to suspend family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection for a period of two years, from March 2016, has been widely criticised. It has had particularly far-reaching consequences as after it was taken, the number of people, notably many Syrians, being granted this subsidiary protection as opposed to refugee status increased significantly. My discussions in Berlin, however, suggested that the German authorities had acknowledged these criticisms and had come to a greater appreciation of the importance of family reunification to integration. Indeed, the authorities told me that their focus for the period after the suspension comes to an end will be on ensuring that all family reunification applications are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

5.5. Unaccompanied minors and members of other particularly vulnerable groups

36. Particular attention must be paid to unaccompanied minors,¹² who often arrive when they would be leaving compulsory education, but may be reluctant to enter education in the host country, preferring instead to work. With poor language skills, no formal qualifications and little or no relevant work experience, they risk either being forced into irregular, low-paid, even exploitative work, or finding themselves not in education, employment or training. Such situations may have very long-lasting negative consequences for the person concerned, that become more difficult to redress the longer they persist. Experience has shown that far greater – three to five times – levels of expenditure are necessary to achieve satisfactory integration outcomes for unaccompanied minors. It must nevertheless be borne in mind that in the long-term, the alternative may prove far more costly for both the child concerned and the host community.

37. Specific accommodation facilities should be created providing a sheltered environment for unaccompanied minors, with immediate access to integration services, beginning with language training; this may, under certain conditions, be a foster family. Unaccompanied minor refugees should be provided with an individual guardian and a tailor-made programme of support, including integration measures. In Bergen, Norway, for example, the municipality conducts an individual assessment of the needs of each child, both upon arrival and on a regular basis. The children are supported in expressing their wishes in terms of expectations from the welfare and assistance system and plans for the future.

38. Special provision should also be made for unaccompanied minors who reach adulthood, to avoid an abrupt and destabilising transition from one administrative regime, and the support it provides, to another.¹³ In Berlin, for example, the authorities' aim, in collaboration with the association for vocational training, is to have all of the 12 000 refugees between the ages of 16 and 21 in either education or training; with progress overseen and co-ordinated from the initial stages of literacy and/or language education in "welcome classes", through the normal German school system for those of appropriate age, and then into vocational training and ultimately, it is hoped, employment. The "SchlaU-Schule" in Munich provides a specially adapted environment with individualised teaching to help unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees to obtain their school-

12. The UNHCR, in its 1997 Guidelines, defines an unaccompanied minor as "a person who is under the age of eighteen, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier and who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so".

13. See also [Resolution 1996 \(2014\)](#) "Migrant children: what rights at 18?".

leaving certificates. The authorities should also take advantage of the presence of qualified teachers in the refugee community, as is done in Sweden, where Syrian teachers give classes in Arabic to newly arrived asylum seekers whilst themselves participating in supplementary teacher-training courses.

39. Members of other vulnerable groups should also be given appropriate protection. For this to be effective, vulnerability screening should be undertaken at the earliest possible opportunity. Once vulnerabilities have been identified, appropriate action should immediately be taken, including for example referring the persons concerned to providers of relevant specialist care and/or transferring them to suitable accommodation. Failure to take such action risks exposing vulnerable persons to various forms of harm whose consequences may, amongst other things, complicate future efforts at integration.

6. Equipping migrants for successful integration

6.1. Language training

40. Language training is perhaps the most important “country-specific” integration measure. Daily life in the host community depends on it and even the most highly qualified or skilled refugees will not find work unless they can communicate in the local language. It should therefore start at an early stage; be adapted to the individual's level of education and to their availability, given other commitments; include the possibility of specialised training in job-specific terminology (which may be best provided as part of vocational training); and be flexible in its form and duration. In Norway, for example, there are three separate tracks: for those with little or no prior schooling (including illiterates); for those with some prior schooling; and for those with a good general education, up to tertiary level, for whom faster progress is facilitated. The Council of Europe's “Language Integration for Adult Migrants” programme has developed a website intended to allow pooling of and access to useful resources, including amongst other things a guide entitled “Refugees need language – how can volunteers give support”. Moreover, from 30 March to 1 April 2016, the Council of Europe organised a research symposium on the linguistic integration of adult migrants.¹⁴

41. Norway, for example, offers up to 250 hours of language training to asylum seekers residing in reception centres. In Finland, the Ministry of Employment and Economy considers that refugees' skills should be assessed already whilst they are accommodated in reception centres, so that further integration activities such as language training, education and vocational training can start as soon as possible. In the Saarland region of Germany, counsellors work in reception centres to provide psychological support to new arrivals and advise them on how to live in Germany. Three months after their application is received, Germany allows asylum seekers from countries with high recognition rates access to integration courses involving up to 600 hours of language training and civic education. Other countries, including Spain, Belgium and Italy, offer asylum seekers various combinations of language training, adult education, civic induction, vocational training and skills assessment.

6.2. Skills and qualifications assessment

42. Whilst refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection will almost always have a right of access to the labour market, there is an increasing tendency to extend this right also to asylum seekers. This is usually subject to conditions intended to strike a balance between the risk of abuse of the asylum system by economic migrants not entitled to international protection, on the one hand, and the interest of both asylum seekers and the host country in allowing the former to have access to constructive, gainful employment, on the other; they may also seek to protect the position of domestic workers. They may include a delay between an individual making an asylum application and being granted access to the labour market, applied by most countries with few exceptions (such as Greece, Norway and Sweden);¹⁵ labour market tests to ascertain whether domestic workers are available to fill vacancies (as, for example, in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg and Switzerland); and, more rarely, restriction of access to certain sectors (for example Austria and the United Kingdom). Germany, with its exceptional numbers of asylum seekers and refugees, has in the light of its experience decided to allow access to the labour market after three months to asylum seekers from countries with a high recognition rate, having previously allowed such access only after refugee status had been granted. The new policy allows asylum seekers and refugees to start work or vocational training whilst their motivation is still at its peak.

14. For further information on these and other activities, see www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants.

15. It should be noted that for most European Union member States, the recast 2013 Reception Conditions Directive requires that asylum seekers be given access to the labour market no later than nine months after the date of their application if no first-instance decision has yet been taken, unless the delay can be attributed to the applicant.

43. Ensuring refugees' and asylum seekers' access to labour markets requires assessment of their existing skills and qualifications. Most refugees will have fled without documentary proof of their educational or vocational qualifications or professional experience, and so the authorities should be flexible and accommodating in accepting alternative forms of proof.¹⁶ Assessing skills and qualifications should be prioritised as the basis for identifying training needs and employment possibilities. In Germany, for example, the Federal Employment Agency has launched a pilot project using innovative video-based methods that allow testing of basic competences in a real-life context, with results available within 48 hours; the aim is also to ensure transparency and confidence on the part of potential employers. The public employment service in Vienna, Austria, conducts "competency checks" as part of five-week programmes that also provide relevant information and training in companies, and at the end of which participants receive a report setting out their competences.

6.3. Vocational training and access to the labour market

44. For most asylum seekers and refugees, some degree of vocational training will be necessary to enhance their attractiveness to employers in the host country. There are many, varied examples of such activities across member States. In Neuchâtel, Switzerland, the regional Integration Office and the local Chamber of Agriculture and Viniculture work together on the "AGRIV" project, which provides technical language lessons, professional training and short internships to refugees with previous agricultural experience; this then allows local farmers to employ certifiably competent refugees instead of recruiting seasonal workers from abroad.

45. In Berlin, the local Chamber of Commerce and Trade provides "start-up classes" for refugees who had been self-employed in their countries of origin, and also runs a programme called "bridging the gap" to help refugees' transition from basic "welcome classes" to vocational training. The "Diversity in the Economy and Local Integration" (DELI) joint programme of the Council of Europe and the European Union, active in a network of 10 cities, encourages more efficient local policies in support of migrant-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and migrant entrepreneurship as part of wider diversity and inclusion/integration policies.¹⁷ At the "one-stop-shop" for migrants I visited in Lisbon, migrants were able to follow training in entrepreneurship and given advice and contacts for setting up their own small businesses.

46. Businesses can also contribute to facilitating refugees' access to the labour market. In Geneva, a local association providing bicycles on free loan in the summer and for rental throughout the year has offered hundreds of internships and training positions to refugees and local unemployed people. They have been able to work in areas such as customer service, business management, logistics and bicycle mechanics and maintenance. This allows refugees to become accustomed to interacting with people of various origins and social backgrounds, improve their language skills and prove both their own competence and the potential of refugees in general to contribute to society. In Germany, the multinational company Siemens began working with the municipality of Erlangen to provide internships for skilled asylum seekers, a project that has since been expanded across the country. This has been described as a "win-win-win" situation: asylum seekers receive training and work placements; other employees have the opportunity to interact with asylum seekers and challenge any prejudices they may have; and Siemens can make use of the potential of qualified asylum seekers.

47. Civil society initiatives can also play an important role in bringing together refugees and potential employers. In Berlin, for example, the NGO Arrivo acts as an intermediary between asylum seekers, and artisan SMEs, offering specialised language classes and training in basic craft skills that may lead to vocational training and internships with local employers. The Institute for Talent Development has been working with young refugees since 2015, at the request of employers in the health services, industrial, craft and hotel sectors. It organised two special job fairs in 2016, with excellent feedback from employers, 50% of whom reported having found refugees who were suitable for training. Indeed, some of those I met in Berlin

16. The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165, "Lisbon Convention") obliges its States Parties to show flexibility in the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, including through provisional recognition of their qualifications on the basis of a sworn statement or the provision of special examinations to allow refugees to prove their qualifications. It has been ratified by all Council of Europe member States, with the exception of Greece and Monaco.

17. For further information, see <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/deli>. A final conference highlighting the results of the DELI and C4i projects took place in Brussels in June 2015, and their broad aims have since been incorporated into the Intercultural cities programme (see above).

reported that certain employers preferred to work with, for example, organisers of job fairs than with the authorities. I was able to visit a seaside hotel near Lisbon run by the Inatel Foundation, which runs an on-the-spot training course in hospitality skills for employment in its subsidised hotels for senior citizens.

7. Social and cultural integration and respect for the values of the host community

48. Social, cultural and sporting activities represent one of the best means for bringing refugees and the host community together in a deliberately relaxed, informal and flexible environment. This is another area in which civil society can play a particularly important role; indeed, the often spontaneous and voluntary nature of civil society action may be better suited to this than the more “top-down”, bureaucratic nature of administrative intervention. The authorities should nevertheless recognise the importance of action in this area and encourage and support the activities of civil society organisations. This can be done in various ways, from facilitating contacts and publicising activities, to providing premises, equipment or financial assistance. The benefits of such activity are important for refugees’ dignity, self-respect and sense of agency and engagement.

49. In Borlänge, Sweden, for example, a local businessman set up a bandy team (a form of ice hockey) to promote interaction between the Somali refugee and native Swedish communities. The Portuguese Centre for Refugees uses theatre activities to help refugees learn Portuguese and gain social self-confidence. S.C. Bomani Berlin is a football club composed mainly of refugees that plays in local league and cup competitions and was involved, along with the Volkshochschule adult education centres that provide refugees with language training, in organising a football tournament for teams composed of native Germans and refugees from five countries. The “Museum as a Meeting Point” project, a collaboration between several Berlin museums, involves training Syrian and Iraqi refugees as guides who then provide tours of the museums for other Syrian and Iraqi refugees in their mother tongue.

50. In Norway, the Red Cross runs a programme called “Refugee Guides” to encourage locals and refugees to commit to spending time together over a 9-month period, giving refugees a chance to practice their Norwegian and familiarise themselves with social norms, as well as getting help with bureaucracy. It also allows Norwegians to learn about the situation in the refugees’ countries of origin. A related project in Bergen, run in co-operation with the Introduction Centre and the Child-Care Service, operates on an individual level to help young adults (aged 15 to 25), especially unaccompanied minors, build their own social network through connections with Norwegian families.

51. Integration also means ensuring that asylum seekers and refugees understand and respect the basic cultural and constitutional values of the host country, including in areas such as respect for diversity and gender equality and appropriate behaviour in public places. Especially in this area, activities can only succeed on the basis of voluntary participation in a collaborative process, for which engagement with refugees’ community and religious leaders is very important. This can be a delicate and difficult area for the authorities to deal with, but if problems are to be avoided and public confidence maintained, it is crucial that they take positive action. The series of sexual assaults and thefts committed in various towns and cities across northern Europe on New Year’s Eve 2015, in some cases by asylum seekers, illustrate the consequences of failing to act for individuals’ behaviour, for public perception of refugees and asylum seekers in general, and, of course, for the victims of these crimes, most of whom were women. In Finland, the authorities as well as civil society actors distribute information on diversity and cultural norms already in the reception centres at an early stage. In Hungary, children have a specific school subject called “Man and society” in order to “develop knowledge and skills related to equal treatment and equal opportunities”.

52. The obvious difficulty lies in identifying and articulating these “values” in a way that finds consensus amongst the host community and is meaningful and accessible to asylum seekers and refugees. The German federal government, in collaboration with the German Artists’ Association, intends to lead a broad public discussion on the topic, addressing issues such as religious freedom and tolerance, anti-Semitism and attitudes towards the State of Israel, gender equality and relations between women and men, and child marriage. The latter, as well as the issue of polygamist marriage authorised in some countries of origin, raise legal concerns for which solutions have to be found which comply with national legislation while avoiding sanctions and providing counselling for those already engaged in family structures which become unlawful on arrival in the host country.¹⁸

18. In 2015, the separation of a 15-year-old Syrian girl from her 21-year-old husband in Bavaria was contested in Bavaria’s Family Court, which ruled that German law should take precedence over Sharia law. However, in May 2016, the Bavarian High Court overturned the decision, and gave Alia permission to return to her husband on the basis of a civil registration of their marriage in Syria. The case is now before the Federal Court.

53. As noted above, many refugees will remain in the host country for years, decades or even indefinitely. The longer the person remains, the stronger will be their ties with the host country – with friends and neighbours, work colleagues, possibly native-born spouses, children's schools, etc. – and the more remote may seem the country of origin, especially for children born in the host country. The prospect of returning “home” may feel increasingly unreal. In such circumstances, the final stage in integration would be the granting of citizenship; in some ways, this is similar to newly arrived asylum seekers’ need for prompt registration and rapid status determination, as it clarifies and stabilises their legal status and rights. Whilst refugees may be required to satisfy certain conditions in order to obtain citizenship, there should be no need for them to meet higher standards than other applicants, much less be denied the right to apply.

8. Integration and radicalisation

54. Refugees and asylum seekers are far more likely to fall prey to radicalisation if they feel marginalised, excluded or discriminated against, or are otherwise alienated from the host community. Integration is an important counter-measure to the risk of radicalisation, since it emphasises the host community’s care for the refugees’ well-being, belief in their potential to make a constructive contribution to society and respect for their fundamental dignity and value as a human being, whilst also building the refugees’ understanding of and identification with the host community. Young people are particularly prone to radicalisation, which is one more reason why particular attention should be paid to the protection needs of unaccompanied minors, and why States should avoid applying overly-restrictive family reunification policies. Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former president of Finland Martti Ahtisaari once said that the biggest threat to global peace and stability is too many young men with nothing to do. Member States should bear this in mind and focus their attention on reaching out to these young men (and women) by engaging them in activities that give them purpose and hope for the future.

55. The German NGO Hayat (which means “life” in Arabic) intervenes in cases of radicalisation at the invitation of parents or when informed of situations of concern by mosques or schools. It also has connections to the German Islamic Conference and the Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees. Hayat considers that a lack of access to integration measures may be a contributory “push-factor” towards radicalisation, adding to underlying individual considerations such as the individual’s immediate personal and family situation. In Bergen, Norway, the authorities, working with the local Somali population, sought to address issues such as poor language skills, low levels of education and low employment rates, along with family breakdowns and fundamental cultural differences – all factors reflecting poor integration – in an Anti-Radicalisation Action Plan for 2015-2020. Involving the police, imams and schools, this plan includes anti-radicalisation activities such as training for Muslim communities on issues like freedom of expression and religious diversity, and discussion groups on issues such as domestic violence, leadership and social integration. It also targets individuals who are in the process of being or have been radicalised, with a special focus on young people. Bergen’s experience in this area underlines the importance of involving refugee communities and their leaders in the design and implementation of projects that concern refugees.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

56. Integration of refugees is a very complex issue, involving numerous actors and a wide range of possible measures across different areas of activity, often over a long period of time. In the limited space available, I have tried to examine and explain the principal issues, giving selected examples of projects and activities that have proved effective, often ones that were developed and implemented in response to the critical situation of 2015-16. In preparing this report, I have found it reassuring that actors at all levels of society in many member States now fully appreciate the importance of integration policy – if they did not do so already – and are taking a constructive, innovative, open-minded and determined approach to ensuring that integration in their country works.

57. We must not, however, be complacent. The sheer number of people who arrived in Europe is a challenge in itself, with even a country like Germany still dealing with a backlog of asylum applications. Whilst much of the anxiety of early 2016 has now dissipated, the series of terrorist attacks over the past year, some of which were committed by individuals who obtained entry as asylum seekers, has had the unfortunate effect of associating refugees with security risks in some people’s minds. This complicates the task of integrating those who are entitled to protection, especially when extremist politicians – and, regrettably, some politicians who would otherwise be considered moderate – add to public fears by indulging in ill-founded scaremongering and even hate speech against refugees and migrants. This is both unacceptable in itself and counterproductive: integration of refugees is a long and complicated process, requiring durable commitment

on the part of both the refugees and the authorities, with the continuing engagement of civil society. If policy no longer promotes integration and the public mood towards refugees is one of mistrust and hostility, they risk becoming isolated, increasingly alienated and at risk of radicalisation.

58. Furthermore, since the arrival of refugees will not (and should not) come to a complete halt, and since there are already so many people who now benefit from protection in Europe, ensuring their effective integration into host countries is a necessary and inescapable task; resources devoted to it are not wasted but are above all an investment in potential, with important future returns. On the basis of my examination of the situation across Europe today, I propose a series of basic principles for action at national and European levels, as set out in the accompanying draft resolution.