

Resolution 2176 (2017)¹

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

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In 2015, the mass arrival of refugees in western Europe via Turkey, Greece and the western Balkans, combined with the continuous inflow via Italy, brought the increase of the number of refugees and migrants to a climax. The responses of the general public to this crisis have included 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 new arrivals. This, along with experience gained in countries receiving fewer refugees, could be shared with others, thereby encouraging greater solidarity and more equitable sharing of responsibilities. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that solidarity and the sharing of responsibilities should be a common concern beyond the boundaries of the European Union, and to this end calls on all member States to demonstrate political courage in finding sustainable solutions for the integration of refugees in their societies.
3. The integration of refugees is a long and complicated process, requiring long-term commitment on the part of both the refugees and the authorities, and 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 the 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 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.

1. *Assembly debate* on 28 June 2017 (24th Sitting) (see [Doc. 14329](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Susanna Huovinen; [Doc. 14354](#), opinion of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Pierre-Yves Le Borgn'; and [Doc. 14347](#), opinion of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Elena Centemero). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 28 June 2017 (24th Sitting).



6. Recalling its [Resolution 2137 \(2016\)](#) on the impact of European population dynamics on migration policies, and referring to [Resolution 2175 \(2017\)](#) 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 increasing levels of migration are a permanent characteristic of Europe today and that, if well managed, the integration of refugees is a means of contributing to demographic renewal, the acquisition of new competences 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. strongly condemning and punishing any form of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and violence against migrants;
- 6.4. promoting the integration of refugees as a public asset worth investing in;
- 6.5. 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;
- 6.6. ensuring that unaccompanied minors receive the necessary legal and social assistance in submitting 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 finalised before they reach the age of majority;
- 6.7. with respect to national policies:
 - 6.7.1. reviewing national legislation and its implementation with a view to facilitating the integration process and eliminating bureaucratic obstacles;
 - 6.7.2. designating a central contact point for refugees, which has the necessary geographical coverage, and through which all of the key integration-related information and services can be co-ordinated and channelled;
 - 6.7.3. ensuring effective co-ordination and co-operation between the different State agencies, regional and local authorities and non-governmental organisations involved in integration projects;
 - 6.7.4. providing for effective legal and political accountability for integration processes at national and local levels;
 - 6.7.5. considering the introduction of a special identity card, if this is not already in place, issued upon registration to give the authorities access to all information on a person which is relevant for the integration process;
 - 6.7.6. introducing different elements, including a gender-sensitive approach, aimed at facilitating integration at the earliest stages of the asylum determination procedure, including psychological trauma support, and the provision of female asylum officers and interpreters;
 - 6.7.7. 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;
 - 6.7.8. creating an environment and conditions which promote the activities of non-governmental organisations and civic initiatives aimed at increased integration of refugees and migrants, and encouraging the involvement of the local population;
 - 6.7.9. 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 allow policies to be better adapted to specific circumstances at national, regional and local levels, and promote a sense of shared responsibility;
 - 6.7.10. ensuring that multimedia 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;

6.8. with respect to the settlement of migrants in the host country:

- 6.8.1. ensuring that relocation of migrants is carried out taking into account the capacities of and opportunities available in the places of settlement, including educational and job opportunities, as well as to the social and community needs of the refugees concerned, the possibility to live according to their culture and religion, and their family circumstances;
- 6.8.2. providing adult migrants with the necessary language and vocational training courses and a level of civic instruction which provides guidelines for everyday life in the country;
- 6.8.3. creating conditions and measures for the recognition and validation of academic and professional experience and qualifications for those refugees without proof of their diplomas;
- 6.8.4. 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, and providing for the possibility for refugee children to continue education even in cases where relocated families decide to resettle in a place other than that originally foreseen;
- 6.8.5. strengthening the capacity of teachers to integrate refugee children fully in the school environment, and including human rights, non-discrimination and migration issues in the teacher training curriculum;
- 6.8.6. providing young unaccompanied migrants with support for their integration through social participation and access to education, while ensuring support in their transition beyond the age of 18;
- 6.8.7. fully recognising the key role of women for the successful integration of migrant families and ensuring that the specific needs of migrant women are duly taken into account in terms of access to sexual and reproductive health, vocational and linguistic training, and independent access to education, while providing the necessary resources and training staff;
- 6.8.8. understanding that family reunification is an integral part of successful integration and thus should not be subject to additional obstacles, suspensions or other measures causing delays in reunification;
- 6.8.9. granting an individual legal status to migrant women who join their spouses through family reunification, if possible within one year of their date of arrival;
- 6.8.10. protecting and assisting particularly vulnerable groups, such as women, girls and unaccompanied minors, including by providing the latter with individual guardianship and follow-up into adulthood;
- 6.8.11. ensuring proper resources for social and health-care services for migrants, and making good use of existing youth, cultural and sports initiatives that foster inclusiveness;
- 6.8.12. making use of platforms for international dialogue and co-operation, for exchange of information and experience, such as the European Parliamentary network on diaspora policies, the Council of Europe Sport migrant integration platform and the Council of Europe's Intercultural cities programme, to take advantage of best practices and models.