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Resettlement of Refugees and Surplus Agricultural Workers

Report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population

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A. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

1. Having examined the reports of the Committees on Agriculture, on Population and Refugees and on Economic Questions, concerning the resettlement of surplus and refugee agricultural workers and the development of Southern Europe;
2. Noting that agriculture is one of the mainstays of the general economy of most European countries and that country-dwellers represent a third of the total population of the member countries of the Council, and, in some countries, more;
3. Considering that an attempt should be made to guide agricultural production in the light of the following factors :
 - a. technical factors : geological and climatic influences and the dangers of erosion;
 - b. economic factors :
 - national requirements and the most profitable markets;*
 - the need to raise the standard of living of farmers, who are heavy consumers- of industrial goods, and thereby further the interests of the workers, industry and trade, with a view to the achievement of full employment;*
 - the importance of encouraging individual ownership and improving the lot of the smallholder;*
 - the advantages to be gained from improving agricultural productivity by reducing costs, thus preparing the way for an increase in the quantity of marketable foodstuffs, a reduction of retail prices, and so for greater consumption of such foodstuffs;*
 - the value of improving the presentation, storing, packaging and marketing of agricultural produce while narrowing the gap between prices paid to the producer and those paid by the consumer;*
4. Considering that the European countries should closely unite to give support and assistance to those countries most immediately affected by the problem of refugees and surplus agricultural workers,
5. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers, in liaison with the Ministers of Agriculture, give the countries in question every technical, political and financial encouragement.

I. Technical Assistance

In the course of the surveys carried out by the Assembly committees concerned, it was found that in some European countries agriculture is labouring under the handicap of out-of-date equipment. There is also not seldom a lack of technical consultants whose advice might lead to better husbandry and higher yields.

In the Mediterranean countries, particularly, more extensive irrigation would make it possible to grow more fodder crops, the absence of which prevents the breeding of first-class stock, and also increases the risk of soil erosion.

The building of silos, the establishment of co-operatives, and the more liberal application of chemical fertilisers, the use of which is frequently restricted by their high cost, would make it possible to turn land over to new and more profitable crops.

Ways should be sought of making available to smallholders modern mechanical equipment suited to local soil and climatic conditions.

Teams of qualified experts could, at the request of individual countries, work out large-scale plans to improve rural conditions and remedy concealed unemployment in the over-populated countries, and also plans for industrialisation.

II. Political Assistance

The arrival of refugees in countries with a very high birth-rate and little or no industry has led to over-population.

This state of affairs is causing these countries to break up existing properties often to such an extent that the resulting holdings can scarcely be made to pay their way.

This practice results in a lack of marketable foodstuffs as also to the increased growth of a rural proletariat which may at some future date become a disturbing element in the social structure of these countries.

The Assembly therefore urges the Governments :

- a. to seek markets for specialised products the cultivation of which would require considerable numbers of workers and thus reduce under-employment;
- b. with regard to countries which dispose of uncultivated or waste land in or outside Europe, to allow general immigration, as a regular policy, even if this must be on a reduced scale;
- c. with regard to countries which are short of manpower, to make extensive use of the manpower of countries which suffer from permanent under-employment and, to this end, to simplify the administrative procedure, whose complexity is frequently a barrier to intra-European migration.

III. Financial Assistance

Whatever the method adopted, whether the surplus population is to be absorbed locally or by a European or non-European country, no substantial results can be achieved unless financial assistance is given to the States concerned, with a view either to facilitating the settlement of migrants or to industrialising the under-developed areas. This concept, already set forth in Recommendation 35 of 1952, reappears in the Special Representative's report. International financing on a considerable scale, in the form of a redeemable loan, is the only way of ensuring effective long-term action.

IV. Work of the Special Representative

The Assembly, which has more than once recorded its approval of the Special Representative's conclusions, welcomes the establishment of the European Fund for the financing of all economically sound schemes likely to reduce—either by local resettlement or by intra- or extra-European emigration—the demographic pressure from which the countries in question are suffering.

The Assembly trusts that no time will be lost in carrying out its proposals and those of the Special Representative and hopes that the first loans granted by the Fund will go towards solving this problem.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1. In the course of its journeys the Joint Sub-committee on the Resettlement of Surplus of Refugee Agricultural Workers has gained a close insight into the situation of the rural populations and refugees in Germany, Italy, Greece and Turkey.
2. It wishes to express its warm thanks to the Governments of the countries visited for their kind welcome and the information they placed at its disposal.
3. It is in some respects difficult to compare the economic features of these different countries; in addition to technical, social and political considerations, there are climatic and geographical variations. These underlying factors, naturally, have a considerable influence on conditions of production, the nature of crops, the level of productivity and the assessment of costs.
4. In some respects, however, the above countries have a similar agricultural structure. For instance, in the areas visited, the pattern of holdings is roughly the same : small farms predominate and large estates are tending to disappear. This trend towards smaller farms has, in some countries such as Greece and Italy, even led to the fragmentation of estates and the creation of microfundia, the obvious drawbacks of which were pointed out in the special report. It would be advisable either to redistribute these excessively small holdings which cannot be made self-sufficient or to create local industries capable of absorbing surplus manpower.
5. From a demographic standpoint, it should be noted that the excess population of the Western European countries is mainly of peasant origin as there are more large families in the country than in the towns.
6. Another phenomenon common to all the countries concerned is the discrepancy between the price paid to the producer and that paid by the consumer. The commercial distribution cycle is in varying degrees extremely cumbersome and has led in Italy, Greece and Turkey, to the institution of co-operatives as an act of self-protection on the part of producers.
7. The slowing down and at times complete cessation of overseas migration from European countries has increased demographic pressure, particularly in Italy and in Greece. The need to feed an ever-growing population has led to the maximum exploitation of all the suitable land, including land which elsewhere would be regarded as marginal. In order to place this marginal land under cultivation, the Governments perforce had to make considerable sacrifices and invest money in projects which were sometimes very costly and often barely paid their way. In the Mediterranean countries farming has spread to the hills which were once covered with woodlands or scrub, with the result that erosion has made rapid inroads causing occasional disasters and frequent floods which have destroyed crops in the nearby plains.
8. The causes of demographic pressure are either a high birth-rate—in which case the pressure is constant and tends to increase at an extremely rapid pace—or a mass influx of persons from countries invaded or occupied by a foreign Power, or other social or political factors. In the latter case, which particularly applies to the influx of national refugees, this pressure has dangerous implications and calls for immediate measures.
9. At various times, and to a greater or lesser extent, the four countries under review have all experienced an influx of refugees, and each has had to make the necessary arrangements to receive them. Whatever may be done for them, these newcomers disturb the general economy and increase the threat of under-employment—particularly the agricultural workers who, when they reach a certain age, have difficulty in adapting themselves to other work. Some of them are still in transit camps. The maximum exploitation of available land makes for inefficient farming, but, in order to avoid importing basic foodstuffs and to save foreign currency, nations encourage the growing of vital crops not necessarily suited to the local climate and soil. For instance, during the fact-finding visits, it was noted that the cultivation of cereals has now spread to unsuitable areas where yields are low and cost prices accordingly high. A useful measure in connection with the general harmonisation of European agricultural markets might be to replace cereals in these areas by other crops which would keep more labour employed all the year round.
10. On the other hand, the Sub-committee occasionally came across poor grazing land with fertile soil which, if suitably exploited, could produce higher yields.
11. We now turn from general considerations to a summary of the main information gathered in the course of the fact-finding visits.

1. ITALY - (See Doc. AS/SA/PR (6) 4 final)

12. There is a striking difference between the standards of living of the rural populations of Northern and Southern Italy. Whereas in the North the position of the farmer may well be compared with that of his counterpart in the countries to the North-West, the Southern part of Italy is under such strong demographic pressure—there are few areas of the world where it is stronger—that the whole economy is overshadowed by chronic under-employment, mainly among the farming community.

13. Experts estimate that two million jobs will have to be created in the immediate future to absorb this manpower, for with each year that passes this demographic pressure grows, thereby aggravating the problem.

14. The present attempts of Italy to develop its Southern regions are well known. Generally speaking, the country plans, by organisation of its natural resources and rational industrialisation, to absorb those unable to find work under present economic conditions, virtually all of whom are agricultural workers.

15. As the report suggests, Italy seems unlikely to be able to develop its Southern regions without external assistance. A bold policy for the development of the depressed areas is now being pursued under the auspices of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno.

16. Owing to the shortage of power and the sparse rainfall, the development of Southern Italy is an extremely difficult proposition. There is a striking increase in erosion of the top-soil, exposing a layer of sterile clay. Intensive re-afforestation, though absolutely vital, tends to reduce the area of cultivated land and can hardly be contemplated at the moment, since every available plot right up to the hilltops is devoted to crops essential to the survival of the family. Yet, unless there is to be an increase in the natural disasters which periodically descend upon the rich coastal plains, it will eventually be necessary to undertake extensive re-afforestation. Before this can be done, however, the over-crowding of rural settlements will have to be relieved.

17. As matters stand at present, and, in particular, pending industrialisation, the only practical short-term method of reducing demographic pressure is to encourage emigration either to other European countries or overseas.

18. The conclusions of the report prepared by the Special Representative, M. Schneiter, are worth implementing. The Sub-committee therefore feels that the Member States of the Council of Europe should welcome the establishment of a European Fund designed to facilitate the settlement in Europe, or elsewhere, of surplus agricultural workers whose presence may have serious social and political consequences for their own country and for Europe as a whole.

19. A rational and sustained emigration policy and the implementation of the Vanoni Plan should reduce demographic pressure and, therefore, under-employment, and in the long run raise the standard of living of the people of Southern Italy.

20. Agrarian reform, as now applied with patent success, should not involve any further breaking up of properties. As holdings are already so small it is to be feared that in another generation or two their sub-division may lead to the formation of microfundia similar to those in Greece, with their well-known drawbacks. Such holdings are not economically viable, as they yield no marketable surpluses : in the long run they merely swell the numbers of the struggling and chronically under-employed rural population and encourage a rural exodus.

21. The Sub-committee therefore concludes that :

21.1. Considerable capital—estimated by the Italian Government at 1,300 thousand million francs—is required for economic expansion, and particularly industrial development, in the South;

21.2. European or international financial contributions are therefore needed;

21.3. There must be large-scale emigration, assisted by the good will of the other Member States. Skilled workers are more readily received than other migrants;

21.4. European countries with under-populated or uninhabited areas should be asked to make an effort to absorb the surplus manpower;

21.5. The Schneiter Plan will to some extent assist in the solution of this pressing problem.

2. GREECE - (See Document AS/SA/PR (7) 2)

22. Greek agriculture occupies a special place in the Sub-committee's study. It is stated in the report that the rural population in Greece accounts for 62 % of the total. For these peasants, who nearly all farm their own land, life is often a difficult struggle, for the following reasons :

23. (1) Since it became an independent kingdom early in the 19th century, the country has never known a period of peace long enough to enable it to establish a sound economy. Its territory has been invaded and fought over almost incessantly. These external and internal upheavals have been aggravated by systematic destruction. World War II, and its aftermath, the Civil War, have left such scars that a long period of stability will be needed in which to repair the damage. On top of this man-made destruction, parts of Cephalonia, Thessaly and the Ionian Islands have recently been devastated by earthquakes.

24. (2) Greece is ill-served by its geological and geographical configuration. The mountainous nature of the country makes farming difficult, and deforestation has caused such erosion that some land at present under cultivation may well become sterile. Furthermore, the Mediterranean climate with its irregular rainfall and exceptionally dry summers, makes it difficult to raise fodder crops.

25. (3) A third factor is population pressure. In this predominantly agricultural country the greater part of the population lives on the land. As there is little more land to be brought under the plough, the reforms of successive Governments have only resulted in an excessive sub-division of holdings, with consequent low yields. The Greek small-holder has not sufficient land to feed his family and produce a marketable surplus. Each family lives in a closed circle. Hence the Greek market is doomed to stagnation, and in order to feed the large towns such as Athens and the Piraeus it is necessary to resort to massive imports which must be paid for in foreign currency and cause serious balance of payments difficulties.

26. For these reasons and, particularly, the last-mentioned, the standard of living of the rural population remains extremely low. There is chronic under-employment, and even undernourishment, which, if allowed to continue, may have grave political and social consequences.

27. From the European standpoint this situation is very distressing, but it is not irremediable. The Sub-committee suggests that the living conditions of the Greek rural population could be improved if the following steps were taken :

28. (1) Relieve the demographic pressure, which is rising year by year and is aggravated by the presence of a large number of refugees. Plans must be made for the large-scale emigration of hill farmers (a tradition which dates from the earliest times). M. Schneider estimates in his report that the annual emigration figure over a period of five to ten years should be at least 35,000, mainly from the agricultural population;

29. (2) Encourage external financial assistance. Capital is needed in order to develop irrigation and the cultivation of fodder crops and so obtain higher yields of cereals and a higher output of meat, rice, fruit and early vegetables. Land improvements in the lower coastal plains must be pressed forward. This is a long-term process, but if this land were irrigated its higher fertility would permit specialisation of crops and would increase the volume of marketable or exportable produce. These new resources would raise the standard of living of the agricultural population;

30. In this connection external financial assistance is essential if these areas are to be industrialised and part of the surplus manpower absorbed;

31. (3) Encourage tourism in Greece, a country which on account of its historical associations has an undeniable attraction for tourists.

32. The Greek Government is, in fact, pursuing the above aims. But these efforts will meet with little success unless the other European countries, as a demonstration of solidarity, come to the help of the Greek Government, half of whose financial resources are devoted to military expenditure necessitated by treaty obligations. The recent earthquakes have added to the Greek Government's financial difficulties.

3. GERMANY - (See Doc. AS/SA/PR (5) 3)

33. As a result of the last war, Western Germany was faced with a particularly difficult situation caused by the massive influx of expelled persons and refugees from the East. Their number has been estimated at over 10,500,000 persons, of whom 1,470,000 were agricultural workers. This exodus has gone on since the end of the war and arrivals are still reported from time to time. In 1953, 37,500 families entered Germany, of whom 13,000 were smallholders.

34. Before the war, Germany had a balanced economy. The western part of the country was mainly industrial while the eastern areas provided a surplus of agricultural produce. This equilibrium has now been destroyed and the Federal Republic, in order to feed a dense population in which the industrial element predominates, is obliged to import foodstuffs.

35. One of the finest, if not the most outstanding, of the Federal Republic's achievements was to house, feed, support and absorb into its economy this uprooted population. The Sub-committee wishes to pay a tribute to the tenacity and energy with which the Government of the Federal Republic has solved, almost unaided, its refugee problem.

36. This considerable influx of manpower, despite the innumerable material difficulties to which it gave rise, has had favourable economic consequences : it helped to speed up the work of reconstruction and, thanks to an intelligent and dynamic investment policy, it contributed to the early recovery of German industry.

37. By wise planning, a strong sense of purpose and unremitting efforts, the German Government has succeeded in resettling almost the whole of this population; indeed, in some sectors there is a demand for foreign labour. Yet despite all its endeavours, some 35,000 to 40,000 families of agricultural workers from the Eastern Zone have not yet been absorbed.

38. The Sub-committee had the opportunity of observing the great efforts made to resettle these rural families and the scale on which these measures were financed. It was particularly struck by the *Nebenerwerb*² system, which has created in the highly industrialised regions a semi-industrial and semi-agricultural class.

39. This system has been very successful, and might well be followed by many European countries; from the social standpoint it offers undoubted advantages.

40. Nevertheless, the sums spent on agricultural settlements in the Hunsrück and Eiffel regions seem very high. Indeed, it is questionable whether in the more or less distant future the *Siedlungen*³ in the mountain forests will be an economic proposition. But the social advantages of the scheme must be taken into account; moreover, the development of these regions has this in its favour, that it avoids leaving areas under-populated as is the case in a number of European countries.

41. In conclusion, the Sub-committee considers that the Federal Republic's capacity of absorption is such that with a moderate amount of external assistance it can solve the problem of refugee agricultural workers by pursuing a vigorous policy of land drainage and recovery. Generally speaking, however, in view of the very high ratio of population to area of arable land, some recourse to emigration would be desirable.

42. In any event, the Sub-committee considers that the greater part of the refugee agricultural workers could be absorbed :

- a. by bringing marshy areas under cultivation; the best example of this being the schemes in progress in the Emsland, and by land improvements in certain parts of the territory;
- b. by enabling older agricultural workers to retire on pension, replacing them by younger refugees.

4. TURKEY - (See Document AS/SA/PR (7) 4)

43. The situation in Turkey differs substantially from that in the above-mentioned countries in two particulars :

Population problems;

Structure of holdings.

44. It is estimated that 72 % of the total population lives on the land. The birth-rate is very high and there is a population increase of 3 % per annum. The average density of population varies considerably, some areas being very sparsely inhabited, whereas there are provinces with a density of over 200 inhabitants per square kilometre. Thus Turkey's population problem is one of uneven distribution.

2. System whereby inadequate earnings from the principal occupation can be supplemented by part-time work in another.

3. Associations concerned with the settlement of refugee agricultural workers.

45. A feature of the agricultural system is the high percentage of labour which it absorbs. Thus, out of every ten workers, eight are employed on the land. This proportion is typical of all predominantly rural communities and clearly indicates that Turkey still lacks a large-scale industrial system suitably distributed throughout the country. However, the Sub-committee was able to observe the efforts of the Turkish Government to industrialise the country.

46. Like the other countries under review, Turkey has its own refugee problem, particularly with regard to agricultural workers.

47. In 1950 Turkey began to admit refugees of miscellaneous origin, in particular, from Bulgaria, and its Government and people have taken vigorous action to find them a place in the Turkish economy. New settlements have been established and considerable financial sacrifices have been made.

48. The Committee's report on Turkey contains statistics as to the number of refugees admitted and settled, though their accuracy cannot yet be guaranteed, since an exodus of Turks from Yugoslavia is still in progress, and the Ankara Government expects a further influx of some 100,000 refugees from this source.

49. As regards agriculture itself, certain trends during the last thirty years are worthy of note : changes in methods of cultivation and the types of crops grown. The traditional crops such as tobacco, hazelnuts, raisins and figs have given way partly to cereals, which now cover an area of 11 million hectares, or 87 % of the arable land.

50. Although mechanisation is still in its early stages, much has been done to encourage it by means of loans and the establishment of co-operatives and experimental centres.

51. Economists agree that Turkish agriculture has considerable potentialities as regards exports and intensification but the preparation of overall plans is hampered by shortage of capital and technicians. A great effort should be made to step up the production of fodder crops, for more widespread irrigation is quite feasible. This would not only make it possible to increase the quantity and quality of livestock, but would also reduce the risk of erosion and humus deterioration.

52. The Sub-committee's survey of the general position showed that Turkey still has land reserves.

Although Turkey, too, must carry a heavy defence burden, it could nevertheless play an important part in any plan to harmonise the European agricultural market by developing the agricultural extension services and by selecting crops in greatest demand abroad.

5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

53. It may be noted that geographic conditions vary considerably from country to country and have a marked effect on both production and productivity. While, on the whole, stock-breeding predominates in the countries of Western Europe, the Mediterranean areas are largely fruit, vegetable and wine producers. It is these latter regions which require the closest attention and are in greatest need of external aid in order to achieve real economic prosperity.

54. This external aid should cover the following fields :

joint development of techniques designed to provide protection against the growing danger of soil erosion and to preserve humus⁴;

financial assistance for the establishment of irrigation systems with the object of extending the cultivation of fodder crops, which are essential to any increase in the quantity and quality of livestock. This will result in a higher consumption of foodstuffs and therefore in a higher standard of living;

further industrialisation, particularly in the depressed areas, to go hand in hand with agricultural development, thus enabling super-abundant manpower to be absorbed;

organisation of the tourist industry, thus attracting capital to the underdeveloped areas;

applying suitable immigration and emigration policies.

The countries concerned should do their utmost to carry them out, with the assistance of other European countries. All these measures should be combined with planning of the markets.

4. The FAO European Agricultural Commission has set up a " European Working Party on Land and Water Use and Conservation " with which it might well be worth co-operating.

In the light of the above considerations and the previous reports of your Sub-committee as well as the very interesting reports submitted, in particular by the Committee on Population and Refugees and the Committee on Economic Questions, and having regard to the highly relevant conclusions of the Special Representative, the Joint Sub-committee on the Resettlement of Surplus or Refugee Agricultural Workers has the honour to submit to the Committee on Population and Refugees and the Special Committee on Agriculture the draft Recommendation accompanying to this report.