

Declaration of Mayors

Preamble

Humanity, Solidarity and Voluntariness

Europe's migration policy has been in a deadlock for years. It is caught between the backward-looking discussion about distribution quotas centred on national interests and the idealistic vision of a Europe without borders and is bogged down in the dispute between the maximum desirable and the lowest common denominator. In European asylum and migration policy, it is therefore more important than ever to find a pan-European social consensus instead of a cross-national (state) consensus.

Therefore, we oppose this seemingly hopeless situation, in which the fate of people who are fleeing and our values are at risk of becoming a pawn, with our moral pragmatism. We are cities that commit to a democratic, binding and regulated form of reception of refugees legitimized by their urban societies thus offering them the chance of integration into our common Europe. Integration into our urban societies requires a pragmatism that puts what is feasible at the centre of action. We therefore count on the idea of a network of cities in Europe. Instead of concentrating the burden through hotspots and camps with many of them in a few cities along the Mediterranean, we rely on a wide distribution among many cities, which distributes the burden for the individual city through the power of a broadly supported alliance. We want to supplement the current allocation key as the sole basis in Europe with a broad network of many voluntary municipal reception quotas.

The existing system would thus be supplemented by a view of what is feasible in the municipalities and not solely based on population figures, as it is done with the current allocation keys for refugee admission. In the spirit of moral pragmatism, which combines humanitarian motives with what is locally feasible, a model is to be created that enables those who are willing to receive more people on a one-time or permanent basis to assume more responsibility.

At the same time, admission the population of the host municipality should be rewarded for receiving people. An incentive system should specifically encourage the willingness to host refugees and enable a wider distribution of the burden in Europe.

Complementary voluntary action rather than rigid provisions could be the path towards a system of hosting refugee that is more acceptable to proponents and sceptics alike.

Declaration

As European cities and communities that firmly believe in defending human rights, we have offered a new home to refugees and migrants for decades. We are unconditionally committed

to humanitarian values, universal human rights, and the right to asylum, even in difficult times. Today, we see a wave of solidarity with refugees in our cities and regions. And yet: the migration management is inefficient and unbalanced creating a particularly strong burden on European border states. A pragmatic approach is thus needed in order to help refugees and relieve the cities in border states.

Against this background, we are watching the plans of the European Commission and the EU member states for a new “migration pact” with great concern. Legislation that neither ensures de facto solidarity nor fair burden sharing is incompatible with Europe’s humanitarian values. Neither are the closed camps where people are forced to remain for a long time without any prospects. The proposed measures will not prevent “another Moria”. On the contrary, they would even aggravate the hotspot approach along the EU’s external borders, on the Greek islands, in Lampedusa or Pozzallo, without achieving a just distribution of refugees and asylum seekers among all European states. And those who make it to Europe face accelerated procedures in closed camps on the external borders instead of supportive resettlement and accommodation in local communities. This is not the Europe we envision for the future.

Over the past few years, hundreds of communities across Europe have agreed to host refugees. In light of the ongoing humanitarian crises in the EU border regions, we can no longer stand by and watch. Although the majority of Europe’s population lives in cities and communities, our voice is not being heard in European negotiations. We as cities want to support beneficial political measures and find appropriate legal instruments, but we have no seat at the negotiating table.

We can offer experience, commitment, expertise in questions of integration, inclusion and participation, and a legal obligation to protect basic human rights. This is why the voice of cities standing in solidarity needs to be heard. We hereby reaffirm our offer to help. In accordance with their capacities, municipalities should be able to voluntarily host refugees and provide them with accommodation, protection and safety, so as to safeguard their rights and dignity.

The future migration system of the European Union must open up new paths for cities in Europe to actively and without delay get involved in accommodating and integrating refugees.

We therefore demand of the European institutions and the European national governments:

1. A right to asylum and no transit zones at the external borders

Every reform of the Common European Asylum System must ensure that the individual right to asylum is guaranteed and those seeking protection have effective access to fast asylum procedures.

In the future, all efforts must be made to prevent camp situations like Moria and Lipa. To this end, those arriving at the European coasts must move as quickly as possible to the cities, regions and countries that are ready to receive them.

2. Facilitating direct municipal admission

The willingness of civil society and our communities to support refugees is immense. We are convinced that hosting refugees into our municipalities would alleviate the crisis at Europe’s

borders. Municipalities should have the opportunity to offer admission quotas in order to participate in migration politics. This would enable willing communities to offer additional admission capacities directly to refugees stranded in the border camps.

3. Direct EU funding for host municipalities

The European institutions should provide direct financial support to those municipalities willing to help, so they can fulfil their humanitarian obligations. For this purpose, Europe's cities need a reliable and comprehensive financial framework that goes beyond mere housing and living costs and is understood as a cross-sectional task spanning many fields including education, work, housing and health.

4. Strengthening solidarity

The various ways in which solidarity is being condemned distract the public from the actual problems of the EU migration and asylum policy.

As European cities, we are proposing measures to ensure that solidarity is not merely extended under exceptional circumstances or on a voluntary basis. We therefore ask the European Union to establish a binding mechanism to ensure a fair burden sharing and reception of refugees into EU member states.

To reach these goals, we as cities and municipalities want to work hand in hand at the European and national level in the future.

5. Legal migration paths for a pragmatic immigration policy

Europe will face a growing shortage in population and labour force in the coming years. The effects on various states will differ, but it will become a common challenge. We therefore strive towards a legal immigration policy that presupposes regulated asylum procedures and effective integration measures. This is meant to close the gap and enable states to act accordingly.

The network "International Alliance of Safe Harbours" established at this conference today will help to build a European house based on a global strategy of solidarity, with one fundamental premise: to protect the life of every person forced to flee, whether by sea or over land, and to give them an equal chance of a controlled, constitutional process in accordance with common European regulations and on the basis of our shared European canon of values. Undignified living conditions and the death of too many must not weigh on the conscience of our Europe of solidarity.