

15 December 2019

As leaders from around the world gather to agree a more equitable way for the world to support refugees, I urge you to use this moment to address the glaring gaps in Europe's own response to migration.

At the discussions in Geneva this week, Europe will be looking outwards: with 85% of refugees hosted in low and middle income countries, the focus will be on supporting these countries to enable refugees to work and go to school. This is of course important: even where refugees are offered safety, there are still too many barriers to rebuilding their lives. The good news is that ECHO is an invaluable presence in these countries. It is truly a forward-thinking aid donor, seeking to address challenges in fragile and war-affected states in a purposeful way, and highlighting the extra needs of women and girls in a distinctive way. National development and humanitarian Ministries are also in the field supporting important overseas aid.

However this record of foreign aid hides an unpalatable truth: Europe is failing in important parts of its response on its own shores. By too many measures, Europe is not pulling its weight. Tragically few safe and legal routes exist for people fleeing war and persecution to access safety in Europe. And for those who do make it to Europe, the reality that greets them is far from the humane, efficient processing and integration that is important.

Most starkly, as a direct result of the inability to reach agreement on a fairer way to share responsibility for asylum seekers across Europe, 40,000 people remain in limbo on the Greek islands in inhumane conditions that rank among the worst our teams have seen anywhere in the world. People who have risked their lives undertaking long and treacherous journeys to reach safety face new horrors in Europe: sleeping in flimsy tents in winter, their children exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation, a lack of access to basic medical care. The human cost of the political deadlock that has characterized Europe's response to migration is a stain on the continent's proud record of championing fundamental rights around the world.

Nor is Europe leading the way on the economic and social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. Numerous barriers prevent them from securing a job and an education for their children, the only roads to self reliance. In the case of labour market integration, disparities between refugee women and refugee men, as well as refugee women and women of host countries, are consistently high. Our research shows that even in 'exemplar' countries such as Germany, numerous barriers to labour market participation mean only 6% of women who are recognized as refugees are in employment (as opposed to 27% of refugee men and 53.5% of German women).¹ This is a tragic waste of potential.

I urge you to seize the opportunity offered by the Global Refugee Forum to address this situation, which serves neither refugees and asylum seekers nor host communities. With global displacement remaining high, global resettlement numbers continuing to fall and new arrivals in the EU down to pre-2014 levels,

¹RescueWorks: Unlocking Refugee Women's Potential, International Rescue Committee and Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2019 <https://www.rescue.org/report/rescueworks-unlocking-refugee-womens-potential>

the EU should now send a strong signal of international solidarity with refugee hosting countries in order to maintain its international credibility. Four immediate actions are needed:

- **Commit to a fair and sustainable system to share responsibility for hosting refugees and asylum seekers across Europe, and to help reunite families and relocate vulnerable asylum seekers from Greece into other EU member states as soon as possible.** With the right systems in place, it is not beyond the reach of a wealthy and stable region like Europe to welcome people seeking protection in a fair and dignified manner, but Southern countries cannot be left to do this alone.
- **Support the Greek government in addressing the crisis in Greece and especially on the islands as a matter of urgency.** The processing of asylum claims in Greece is a matter for the Greek government, and it has pledged to upgrade its efforts (using European money), but translators, lawyers and psycho social support workers are desperately needed and Greek personnel need to be supplemented by other Europeans.
- **Make a collective resettlement pledge of at least 30,000 places for 2020 at the Global Refugee Forum and commit to a continuous, sustainable and significant increase in resettlement numbers beyond this annual pledge to reach 250,000 by 2025.** 30,000 represents just 2% of the 1.44 million in need of resettlement in 2020, and even presuming that global needs remain the same rather than continuing to rise, 250,000 would only constitute 17% – less than the EU's GDP and overall wealth would suggest its capacity to be.
- **Pledge to adopt a new and coordinated strategy at EU level to foster social and economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers.** Removing barriers to the economic and social inclusion new arrivals is critical to ensure they can thrive and make a positive contribution their new communities. The new European Commission can play a key role here by bringing forward a new Action Plan, backed by sufficient funding a political will to drive forward the integration of refugees in Europe.

With the new European institutions and leadership now in place, the Global Refugee Forum comes at a moment of renewed momentum to address these urgent issues. I appeal to you to seize this opportunity to put in place a comprehensive, fair and sustainable European response to migration.

Yours sincerely,

David Miliband,

President and CEO, International Rescue Committee