

**Call for a Coalition of Willing EU Countries to Relocate Refugees Now
On the occasion of the European Council meeting on 24–25 June**

To António Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal, holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Copy to: EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson
Janez Janša, Prime Minister of Slovenia, incoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union

The undersigned organisations thank Portugal for its commitment to refugee protection and its engagement in responsibility-sharing mechanisms in Europe over the past years. While the New Pact on Migration and Asylum is being negotiated, human rights continue to be violated at European borders and lives put on hold. In light of your Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the upcoming Council meeting on 24–25 June, we call on you to bring together a coalition of willing Member States to initiate a concerted effort around relocation, starting with 5,000 vulnerable people from Greece. Amid the continued negotiations and disagreements on the proposals in the New Pact, Member States must and can take concrete action now for the thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in frontline countries and show what a functioning solidarity-based European Asylum and Migration policy looks like in practice.

For more than five years, our organisations have witnessed the inhumanity of the containment policy in camps on the Aegean islands and violent pushbacks by EU member states with the involvement of EU agency Frontex. These breaches of international and European law affect thousands of people seeking protection in Europe. It is time to reaffirm and put into practice Europe's commitment to human rights and human dignity.

No more Moria

In September 2020, Europe was startled by the outbreak of a major fire in the inhumane and overcrowded camp of Moria, on the Greek island of Lesbos. The images of desperate people, including children, having again lost everything and being forced to sleep on the street were shocking and shameful. Shortly after the fire, the European Commission presented its proposal for the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. With the launch, Commissioner Ylva Johansson unequivocally stated: 'There can be no more Morias.' The Pact was to mark a 'fresh start' in European asylum and migration policy, bringing a balance between solidarity and responsibility.

Almost a year later, little has changed. Many refugees were transferred to a new camp that soon became known as 'Moria 2.0' due to its appalling conditions. Last winter we were once again witness to families freezing in substandard, flooded tents without heating. Doctors and medics continue to sound the alarm over the invisible mental health crisis unfolding in these containment sites on the Aegean islands, notably among youth and unaccompanied children. On the mainland, thousands of recognised refugees, including families with children and unaccompanied children, have no access to housing or social services, and instead are **being left to survive on the streets of Athens and other cities.**

The urgency of relocation

A number of individual Member States did undertake some one-off initiatives to relocate asylum seekers and refugees. The coalition to relocate 1,600 children and the coordinating role of DG HOME have been a welcome first step, but there is a need to intensify these efforts. The rate of relocations remains extremely low when compared to the number of people in need of transfer out of Greece and other southern EU countries. **Member states have been failing to consistently show solidarity, leaving thousands of people in need of assistance on the Greek islands.**

#Relocationcannotwait – join the coalition of the willing

When Commissioner Johansson visited Lesbos in March 2021, she joined the Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarachi, in stressing the urgency of relocation: *'The real solution [...] is for other EU member states to take more responsibility and not leave Greece with the asylum seekers. Negotiations on a joint migration policy are, however, extremely difficult.'*

There are too many Member States who are turning a blind eye to the situations at the borders of Europe and are undermining a humane, solidarity-based EU asylum and migration policy. The undersigned organisations urge a group of willing leaders in the European Council to take concrete action now. Relocation can not wait!

A coalition of willing EU Member States

Therefore, we call on you to leave the legacy of the Portuguese Presidency by forming a coalition of willing Member States committed to relocation during the upcoming Council meeting of 24–25 June. The coalition should lead the way towards a permanent, predictable relocation mechanism, starting by the relocation of 5,000 asylum seekers and refugees from Greece to safety, by September 2021 – one year after the Moria fire and the launch of the Pact.

Furthermore, we ask you to advocate to establish a relocation coordinator within the European Commission, who would be tasked with making relocation a priority in EU asylum and migration policy. Such a coordinator – and staff – could function as a contact point for relocation initiatives already being undertaken by willing Member States and ensure those initiatives are amplified, could coordinate relocation requests from frontline Member States in need of solidarity and could engage with (new) Member States on relocation efforts.

More than 500 European municipalities are ready to welcome refugees. What we need is member states to join this movement and step up relocation. We stand ready to work with you on this, and hope for a positive response.

Sincerely,

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| Aditus foundation (Malta) | Finnish Refugee Advice Centre | MOAS-Migrant Offshore Aid Station (Europe) |
| African Media Association Malta | Flemish Refugee Action/ VluchtelingenWerk Vlaanderen | Oxfam |
| Are You Syrious? | France Terre d'Asile | PIC – Legal centre for the protection of human rights and the environment Slovenia |
| Asylkoordination Austria | Forum réfugiés-Cosi | Portuguese Refugee Council/ Conselho Português para os Refugiados |
| Boat Refugee Foundation | Greek Council for Refugees | PRO ASYL |
| CEAR: Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado | Greek Forum for Migrants | Refugee Rights Europe |
| C.I.R.-Onlus / Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati | Greek Forum of Refugees | Refugees International |
| Danish Refugee Council | Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights | SOS Malta |
| Defence for Children International (DCI) | International Rescue Committee | Stichting Vluchteling (Dutch Refugee Foundation) |
| DCI Belgium /DCI Netherlands/ DCI Greece/ DCI Italy | INTERSOS/ INTERSOS Hellas | |
| Dutch Council for Refugees | Jesuit Refugee Service – Portugal | |
| Europe Must Act | Kopin Malta | |
| FARR: the Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups | METAdrasi – Action for Migration and Development | |
| | Migrant Women Association Malta | |
| | Mobile Info Team | |

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