

“Villeurbanne Declaration”

For a Humanitarian Asylum Policy in Europe

Preamble

Never before have so many people been forced to flee as today. Currently, around 110 million people are displaced, of whom more than 50 % remain as internally displaced persons in their country of origin. These people are fleeing violent conflicts, wars, human rights abuses and persecution. The number of refugees seeking protection and asylum in Europe has increased significantly in 2022 and 2023. The EU has shown great solidarity by providing protection to millions of refugees from Ukraine and enacting an unprecedented legal mechanism since March 2022.

In spite of the challenges for many municipalities posed by the increasing number of refugees across Europe,

with regard to the ongoing negotiations between the EU Parliament, European Council and the EU Commission on the Common European Asylum System and

in light of the upcoming European Parliament elections in June 2024,

the International Alliance of Safe Harbors reinforces its positions as adopted with the Palermo declaration of April 2021 and, together with affiliated municipalities and stakeholders, enforces key positions with this joint statement.

To achieve our goals we as cities and municipalities want to work hand in hand at the European, national and regional level and ask European and national institutions to support our position as following:

Humanity, Solidarity and Voluntariness

As European cities and communities, we have offered a new home to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants for decades. We are unconditionally committed to humanitarian values, universal human rights, and the right to asylum, even in difficult times. Legislation that favors closed camps at the EU's external borders, that does ensure neither solidarity nor a fair sharing of responsibility, is incompatible with Europe's humanitarian values. The proposed measures will compromise human rights standards and European principles without achieving a just distribution of refugees and asylum seekers among all European Member States.

This is not the Europe we envision for the future!

We advocate for a Europe without illegal pushbacks; for a Europe that protects the life of every person forced to flee, whether by sea or over land; for a Europe that fully respects the rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants and gives them an equal chance of controlled, constitutional processes in accordance with international and European law based on our shared European canon of values.

We need beneficial policies, appropriate legal instruments and measures. We can offer experience and expertise in questions of reception, integration, inclusion and participation. We commit to the legal obligation to protect basic human rights. The EU must value our expertise and include our positions in the reform process of the Common European Asylum and Migration System.

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

The European Union must ensure that the Common European Asylum System guarantees the individual right to asylum and fair and efficient access to swift asylum procedures for those seeking protection. All efforts shall prevent closed camp situations or transit zones at the EU’s external borders. To this end, those arriving at the EU’s external borders shall be distributed and relocated as quickly as possible to the cities, regions and EU Member States. Within the EU relocation mechanism cities and municipalities shall have the freedom to offer reception capacities independently. The distribution and relocation procedure should take family and other meaningful links of the asylum applicants into account.

2. Strengthening solidarity

The European Union shall establish a binding mechanism to ensure a fair sharing of responsibility and reception of refugees in EU Member States. As European cities, we ask for adequate measures to ensure that solidarity is not merely extended under exceptional circumstances or on a voluntary basis. Willing municipalities shall be enabled to offer additional admission capacities.

3. Direct EU funding for host municipalities

The municipalities are key players in the achievement of meaningful solidarity and successful relocation and integration trajectories. Therefore, they shall have the opportunity to participate in migration politics. The European Union shall provide direct financial support to municipalities receiving and integrating refugees.

4. Legal migration paths for a pragmatic immigration policy

The European Union shall strive towards a legal immigration policy that presupposes regulated asylum procedures and effective integration measures.

Signature and date
