

EU refugee crisis: “Relocation is our shared moral duty”

MEPs accused national governments of dragging their feet on the relocation of refugees during a debate in plenary on 16 May.

The plight of migrants risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean has shaken Europe to the core in recent years. With frontline countries such as Greece and Italy affected the most, relocation is one way to share the burden. Ahead of a September deadline for the relocation of 160,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU countries, today MEPs accused national governments of dragging their feet on refugee transfers. MEPs vote on a resolution on relocation on 18 May.

Against the backdrop of an upsurge in sea arrivals in the summer of 2015, the EU adopted [two emergency measures](#) to relocate 160,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy. With only 18,418 people relocated [as of 11 May](#), in a plenary debate today MEPs criticised EU countries for failing to follow through on their commitments. They also insisted that relocation alone will not resolve the crisis.

Jeroen Lenaers (EPP, Netherlands) said it was "a shame" there was no representative from the Council to attend the debate, adding: "I have never been in favour of compulsory quotas but over the past one and a half years we have seen that the voluntary system is not working."

Helga Stevens (ECR, Belgium) said it was unfair to simply hit out at northern European countries: "Greece and Italy are not managing to organise the inflow of refugees." She also noted that the [Dublin rules](#), which determine what EU country is responsible for processing asylum applications, are not being respected.

“A scandalous lack of political will”

Angelika Mlinar (ALDE, Austria) said: "It is not a question of ability, but of willpower. It's high time for member states to follow through on the commitments they entered into." She also compared the EU's efforts with those of countries such [Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey](#) where millions of refugees have been accommodated.

Cécile Kyenge (S&D, Italy) pointed out that **only two EU countries** (namely Malta and Finland) were on track to meet their obligations and asked Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos what would occur following the September deadline. He responded that if member states do not increase their relocations soon, the Commission would not hesitate to launch infringement procedures.

Ska Keller (Greens/EFA, Germany) welcomed the Commission's pledge to take action against member states: "It is not an issue of capacity, it is purely down to a scandalous lack of political will. We're talking about people who are fleeing from war and persecution, and unaccompanied children who are being left alone in overcrowded camps." Last year, **63,300 unaccompanied minors** applied for international protection in the EU, with 57% of all applications registered in Germany alone.

"Relocation alone is not enough"

A number of MEPs stressed that relocation alone would not solve Europe's migration crisis. Ska Keller noted "a good Dublin system, common rules and legal pathways are also needed", while Cécile Kyenge said: "We need a policy to allow safe and legal migration channels, as well as integration policies in the host countries." Angelika Mlinar also lamented the absence of "a proper EU asylum system".

Barbara Spinelli (GUE/NGL, Italy) added her voice to the calls for more efforts than just relocation: "As far as Italy is concerned, in 2015 and 2016, there were 5,049 Dublin transfers and 3,936 relocations. In other words, more people were actually sent back to Italy than were transferred elsewhere."

"Rewarding criminal behaviour"

MEPs were also critical of the role of traffickers and smugglers. Helga Stevens said: "Every asylum seeker who arrives illegally using human traffickers should be sent back to a safe place in the region of origin." Auke Zijlstra (ENF, Netherlands) pointed the blame at "NGOs who are working with human traffickers" adding: "We should not relocate these migrants as we are simply rewarding criminal behaviour."

Some members were critical of migration in general. Non-aligned Hungarian MEP Zoltán Balczó called immigration "a danger to the culture and identity of Europe", while Raymond Finch (EFDD, United Kingdom) said the EU's response to the migration crisis would define the future of the Union: "I urge you to look to the self-interest of your peoples and nations."

"Our shared moral and political duty"

Closing the debate, Commissioner Avramopoulos reiterated MEPs' comments regarding the need for solidarity: "Relocation is often reduced to numbers, but we shouldn't forget we are talking about people in need of protection. It is our shared moral and political duty to ensure that they get this protection as soon as possible and in a manageable way for the EU."

MEPs vote on a resolution regarding relocation on Thursday 18 May. [Watch it live online.](#)

73%

Percentage of Europeans who want the EU to do more on migration
(Eurobarometer poll, March 2017)

[Read our article on the EU response to the migrant crisis.](#)

Find out more

[Video of the debate \(16 May 2017\)](#)

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[Briefing on the refugee crisis](#)



Syrian refugees in Greece © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis



Common goals: migration

<https://www.europartv.europa.eu/en/programme/economy/common-goals-migration>



Refugee integration: transcending borders

<https://www.europartv.europa.eu/en/programme/society/refugee-integration-transcending-borders>