

Creating a safe haven for all: refugees and human dignity in Europe is at a crossroads

Will it show leadership based on its commitment to the values of human rights and solidarity, or will it choose to exclude refugees from access to dignified and safe life, giving way to nationalist and populist agendas?

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions ("Justice and Peace Europe") is calling upon the European institutions, EU Member States and other European countries to take responsibility in granting refugees access to asylum and a decent standard of living.

/.../ The arrival of refugees is used by several political parties to fuel other political agendas in many parts of Europe i.e. anti-EU and xenophobic campaigns. This results in a heavily polarised debate, throwing suspicion on refugees and creating a division in our communities. /.../

Terrorist attacks in Europe have been connected with the arrival of refugees. There is a fear of extremism and radicalism being brought to Europe from the countries of origin. Security challenges in Europe are real and will increase if more terrorist attacks take place in Europe. However, equating refugees with terrorists only plays into the terrorist agenda of hatred and disillusionment. Extremism and radicalisation existing in their own country are actually the motives for refugees to flee their homes. /.../

For Justice and Peace Europe, it is crucial to voice the fundamental values of human rights, solidarity and hospitality. With regards to refugees, the work of Justice and Peace Europe is founded on three fundamental principles: the centrality of the human person, solidarity and hospitality. /.../

/../ Justice and Peace Europe advocates an integral approach, both in analysis and in action. Persistent violence and warfare, global inequality, political oppression and violations of human rights, and the negative effects of climate change are just a few of the root causes of people having to flee their homes in search of safety and human dignity. /.../

However, instead of approaching the situation from a human rights perspective, too many politicians and ordinary people in Europe tend to see refugees as a threat to the European community and its security. This line of thought principally neglects part of Europe's own historical experience in regards to (forced) migration and foregoes the examples of migration being a driver for new ideas and opportunities.

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Treating refugees as a threat can have serious practical consequences for Europe as a normative actor: policy decisions infringe upon the human rights of refugees, most notably the right to life, the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. /.../

Justice and Peace Europe advocates for a change in the approach to the reception, application process for asylum and the integration of refugees. /../

- approaching the issue of refugees from a holistic analysis;
- opening possibilities for safe passage to Europe;
- creating a European asylum system that embeds solidarity between European countries; and
- investing in local solidarity instead of feeding polarisation.