

Migration

Grace Elicker and Carlyn Yoshimura

The refugee crisis in Syria and Northern Africa is recognized as the largest displacement crisis since World War II. Since spring 2011, 11 million Syrians have been displaced, making it the most cataclysmic migration emergency in this century. In addition, 2.9 million Iraqis escaping violence are internally displaced, 200,000 Yemen citizens are now refugees, and 2.4 million South Sudanese and 208,000 Nigerians have fled their homes (United Nations High Commissioner). A refugee, as defined by 1951 UN National Convention on the Status of Refugees, is “a person outside of his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion”. Internally displaced people, on the other hand, are persons who have not yet fled their country of origin. Over 1 million Syrians and 400,000 Northern Africans have come to Europe, many of them seeking asylum in Eastern Europe (Wintour). Although Eastern Asia hosts the greatest number of refugees, a significant portion have come to Europe. Germany and Sweden host the most Syrians in Europe, with about 300,000 and 100,000 respectively (Espivova). According to the UN Refugee Agency, only 189,300 refugees have been permanently resettled worldwide, making the need for asylum an even greater imperative.

The European Union was able to slightly reduce the influx of refugees from Syria by making a deal with Turkey in which Greece is now allowed to return refugees to Turkey in exchange for increased European monetary support for refugees in Turkey as well as looser restrictions for Turks to receive visas (Sieff). Despite these efforts, there are still 6.1 million internally displaced people in Syria, and no plan is devised for Northern Africa (United Nations High Commissioner). The European Union is the leading contributor of humanitarian aid and has accepted a majority of asylum requests, but 70% of funding needed is still unaccounted for and the EU processes relatively few applications, according to the UNHCR. There are still wide disparities from what aid and asylum is given and what is needed, especially regarding Northern Africans, which Europeans are hesitant to address.

Eastern Europe is particularly opposed to refugee resettlement of migrants. According to Gallup, “In nine out of 15 Eastern European countries and areas surveyed in 2016, at least half the population believed their country should not accept any Syrian refugees” (Espivova). Refugee resentment manifests itself in border fences and laws confining refugee camps. Countries like Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic have strong public opinion against refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa, and leadership has shown resistance to EU and UN proposals to accept a quota of refugees. As of June 2017, the EU has taken up legal cases against Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic for their refusal to take in refugees. Although the refugees generally prefer the economic and social benefits offered in Western European nations, EU leadership has made it clear that it will be seeking punishment for Eastern Europe’s reluctance to take in refugees. The unwillingness of certain nations to take in displaced people shows a larger cultural shift in Europe: nations moving towards a populist, nationalist ideology. European leadership states that if Eastern European countries want to enjoy the economic benefits of being associated with Europe, like the EU, then they must do their part in settling displaced people (Wintour).

Refugees that decide to come to Europe face uncertainty and danger beyond the chance of being turned away. The voyage across the Mediterranean can be deadly. According to the UN Refugee Agency, “An estimated 362,000 refugees and migrants risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2016... In the first half of 2017, over 105,000 refugees and migrants entered Europe. This movement towards Europe continues to take a devastating toll on human life. Since the beginning of 2017, over 2,700 people are believed to have died or gone missing while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe, with reports of many others perishing en route. These risks do not end once in Europe. Those moving onwards irregularly have reported numerous types of abuse, including being pushed back across borders” (United Nations). These deaths are avoidable. Legal pathways to asylum, including family reunification programs, would reduce the number of casualties associated with fleeing. Refugees need legal pathways and protections in part because of the dangers they face once they get to Europe. Refugees, who face poverty and uncertainty, often get forced or coerced into human trafficking. These at-risk people could be promised financial security, a quid-pro-quo for a safe passage into Europe, or simply forced into underground operations. Displaced people are most vulnerable to this form of exploitation. Without legal protection, there is no deterrent to stop trafficking, and there is no incentive for victims to seek law enforcement. This is perhaps the most crucial human rights issue of our lifetime. Comprehensive action must occur while there is still a possibility of mitigating the persecution millions face. It is a moral imperative that we expand peacekeeping forces/aid workers to assist nations in emergency. These workers will facilitate the aid and assist in reception of displaced people.

Proposals:

1. Support for Refugees in route from their nation of origin:
 - a. Impose a quota system in which all member nations would accept a designated number of refugees based on population, land area, and economic status. If a nation refuses or fails to meet a quota, its required contribution to the funding of resettlement camps and refugee rehabilitation will be increased by and capped at a margin of 10 percent.
 - b. Designate a portion of state revenues to expanding and maintaining refugee camps, including expansion of medical treatment and counseling at these camps. Detention centers will not be permissible.
 - c. Funding of sea rescue operations to minimize casualties during travel through the Mediterranean Sea.
 - d. Expansion of peacekeeping forces at camps to maintain safety and facilitate security.

2. Pathways to citizenship and long-term resettlement:

- a. Establishing an oversight committee made of government members from each state and the U.N. to develop a regional systematic process for refugees to get asylum status to ensure legal protections. This status will encourage refugees to come forward to report illegal activity, including domestic abuse and human trafficking, without fear of deportation. Additionally, this status will help allow refugees to find employment, housing, and aid. All persons will go through a vetting process.
- b. Since citizenship and permanent resettlement is the ultimate goal of many asylum seekers, where returning to a nation of origin is not a viable option, expand citizenship options to allow final resettlement and reduce the overall number of persons with refugee status.
- c. Creation of a legal fund to represent refugees. This legal aid will be used to help navigate immigration laws for those who cannot afford or access legal counsel.
- d. Designate a portion of revenues to reception for survivors of abuse, assault, and trauma. This will provide counseling and support for the refugees and displaced persons to give them someone to reach out to and to help them reintegrate into society.
- e. In the process of accepting refugees, the Roma people of Eastern Europe will be recognized as internally displaced people and they will receive access to citizenship and protection from persecution.

3. Humanitarian aid at the source for internally displaced people:

Designate a portion of state revenue to humanitarian aid at centers of internally displaced people. This aid will go to reduce famine, increase access to water, and increase medical treatment. The aid will be focused in areas designated as places of emergency by the UN Refugee Agency.

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