

Cultural Daily

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Basic things to know about the refugee crisis

Fatimah Zainal · Wednesday, April 27th, 2016

It is illegal by law to cross international borders without permission. However these days, in Europe, the law is more of a suggestion, as thousands of refugees arrive at the borders each day to escape the iron grip of their brutal governments.

1. Where do they come from?

Consequently, resource-rich Europe struggles to accommodate an influx of refugees and asylum seekers. Weak economies, ISIS, and a brutal civil war in Syria are the major factors that rocket-fueled the migration. But the ongoing violence in Afghanistan and Libya are also leading people to look for new lives elsewhere. Bound for the sun-bleached coasts of Greece, Syrians are the biggest number among these groups of migrants. Some of them are paying smugglers for spots on overcrowded fishing boats or for spots on overcrowded trains or buses.

Migrants are defined as those who make a conscious decision to leave their countries to seek a better life elsewhere; meanwhile refugees are those who are forced to leave their countries at the risk of persecution or imminent danger. One such place is Syria; a cosmic scene of chaos, played out against the backdrop of violence and confusion. Most Syrians are living below the breadline. Their lives torn apart, they seek to escape and build a new life elsewhere. However, they severely risk their lives in their journey to greener pastures. According to the [IOM, 3,406 people have died in the Mediterranean in 2015](#).

2. How many can EU afford to resettle?

Since the advent of the refugee crisis, the bone of contention in the EU remains the disproportionate burden faced by some countries such as Greece, Italy, and Hungary where migrants and refugees have been arriving at a breakneck speed by land and sea. The crisis has forced EU to face the uncomfortable truth, and *answer*: how many can they really afford to resettle? The EU is planning to redistribute 160,000 refugees across its member countries. Hungary and Greece, burdened by their unsteady tenor of economy, have been more reluctant to take in refugees. Germany emerged as the EU's moral compass when it announced that it is expecting 800,000 thousand migrants this year alone. Meanwhile, UK and Ireland respectively agreed to 20,000 and 4,000 while France agreed to take in 13,000. Also, the US has decided to take in 10,000 and Malaysia 5,000 refugees. But since the [UN expects more than 800,000 people to cross into Europe by this year of 2016](#), it doesn't look like these moves will net much success.

3. What is the role of Middle Eastern countries?

A widespread misconception that emerged during the refugee crisis is that Middle Eastern countries did not offer to take in their fair share of refugees. However, Syrians had been resettled there over the past five years since the civil war. In oil-rich Saudi Arabia, already 2.5 million refugees were taken in. Even poorer countries such as Lebanon went beyond and above the call of duty by hosting more than a million Syrians. Jordan, laden by national debt, is stretched thin shouldering the costs of education, welfare, and medical of more than [half a million Syrians refugees in the country](#).

4. How much is the cost of taking in refugees?

Meanwhile in the West, when it comes to crunching numbers, most countries are unconvinced that they can bear the spine-chilling costs that refugees come with. The UN says that it is short of the \$8.4 billion it needs to provide bare minimum services for Syrian refugees. In Germany, the Syrians come with an enormous price tag of more than €11 billion per annum. In US, the first stretch of resettling refugees cost taxpayers [\\$64, 370 per refugee](#).

5. What are the benefits of hosting refugees?

However, not all is acrimony. The economic burden posed by the refugees to the EU is a misconception, although one that remains opaque to many. The economic benefits of taking in the refugees are predicted to equal or even exceed the costs. Each refugee's social security net comes with the price tag of €14,000 which includes food, shelter, education, and monthly allowance. However, given how young most refugees are and how many years they are able to work, it is very likely that over time that initial burden will be paid back by their taxes and their contribution to the country's economy. This is a big advantage to [Germany, whose labor force is aging and shrinking](#) from about 45 million people today to about 36 million in just 15 years. By investing in the refugees now, consequently they can step in to fill this gap in the future. And 15 years is a good amount of time to acclimatize refugees to Europe and train them according to European standards. In the economics of wars, helping Syrian refugees definitely bring more growth to the economy in the long run. Therefore, taking them in is something that any farsighted European country should bank in on.

Top image: Syrian refugees Creative Commons via Flickr.

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