

Migrant Crisis

October 2015

Amnesty International UK is a national section of a global movement of over three million supporters, members and activists. We represent more than 518,000 members, supporters, activists, and active groups across the United Kingdom. Collectively, our vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Our mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of these rights. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion.

Amnesty International's engagement with the subject matter of this inquiry:

1. Amnesty International has been following the ongoing and still escalating global refugee crisis for several years, including at and within Europe's borders. We have, particularly over 2014 and 2015, produced numerous reports and briefings relating to the crisis – including regarding the situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, the situation of refugees and other migrants within Europe and in countries of transit to Europe, and the situation in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. In recent weeks we have given written evidence to the International Development Committee inquiry on the government's response to Syrian refugees; and given oral and written evidence to the EU (Home Affairs) Committee inquiry on the EU action plan on migrant smuggling.
2. We have sections based in several European countries undertaking work on this crisis, coordinated by staff from our international secretariat and Brussels-based European institutions office. Now and over recent days and weeks our researchers are or have been on the ground in several affected European countries including Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia. The Director of Amnesty International UK (AIUK) visited the Hungarian borders with Croatia and Austria, with AIUK's refugee and migrants rights programme director and the Director of Amnesty International Hungary only days before Hungary sealed its border with Croatia (having previously done so with Serbia).

Introduction:

3. This crisis has been growing for several years. To understand its nature and extent, it is necessary to consider this crisis in both human and numerical terms. The main sections below do so, and these are followed by some concluding observations and recommendations. We first set out in brief some key messages.

Key messages:

4. What Europe is currently experiencing is a manifestation of a global refugee crisis. The impact in Europe is visibly dramatic, but in global terms still relatively small. The impact upon the UK on either measure (whether set against Europe's current

experience or the global situation) is numerically still modest. By contrast, the experience of many of those compelled to make and attempt these journeys has been catastrophic.

5. The scale and momentum of this crisis as it is experienced in Europe at this time is a product of many political failures – e.g. to prevent or resolve conflicts, to effectively discourage brutal regimes, to adequately fund and support refugee camps, and to provide the means for refugees to sustain and provide for themselves and their families (including by providing safe and legal routes to reach a place of safety). Wherever responsibility may lie for these and other failures, the fact remains that the global refugee crisis has been left to grow at an alarming rate. This has provided a ‘market’ for the development of now powerful and interconnected smuggling networks. While countries – including the UK – have long pursued policies, which prioritise border security and policing, the factors that compel refugees to attempt increasingly dangerous journeys to attempt to find a place that is safe and provides an opportunity to rebuild their lives have grown.
6. It is urgent that European policy-makers should understand that currently there is not at this time a choice between relatively large-scale refugee migration and no refugee migration. There is a choice between refugee migration that is disorganised, disruptive and dangerous (particularly for refugees) and refugee migration that is organised, facilitated and safe. Any effective response needs to acknowledge and respond to this in a manner that is coordinated, collective and meets the needs, and respects the international legal obligations of states to, refugees.

Global refugee population:¹

7. Following a peak in 2007, the global refugee population number had remained relatively stable for several years up to the end of 2012. Whereas the number may have been relatively stable, this does not mean that the situation for many individuals had been stable. In addition to the precarious nature of the lives of many refugees including in many refugee camps that have long been underfunded and overcrowded, during any particular year there will have been significant numbers of people newly displaced outside their country of origin as refugees and people returning home having been refugees. The global refugee population under UNHCR’s remit at the end of 2008 was 10.5 million people. At the end of 2012, the population was 10.5 million. The following two years saw a large rise in this population.
8. At end of 2013, the global refugee population was 11.7 million. Twelve months later, it was 14.4 million. Although the Syrian crisis explains a large part of the increased number of refugees over 2013 and 2014, it is not a complete explanation. Around 900,000 of the increase were not Syrian refugees. It will be several months before we have confirmation from UNHCR of the situation at this year’s end. However, the indications are that the global refugee population is still rising during 2015.

Countries most disproportionately affected by hosting refugees – globally:²

¹ Data in this section taken from UNHCR’s annual global trends reports

² Data in this section taken from UNHCR’s annual global trends reports, UNHCR website and website of the UN Relief and Works Agency

9. At the end of 2013, 86% of the global refugee population was hosted by countries of the developing world. UNHCR confirmed this “...compared to 70 per cent 10 years ago. This is the highest value in more than two decades.” At the end of 2014, the proportion of the world’s refugees hosted by developing countries remained at 86%, albeit this represented a larger number as the global population had grown by 2.7 million. The least developed countries were by then hosting 3.6 million refugees, a rise of 800,000 over the course of that year.
10. By end 2014, the top ten refugee-hosting countries were – Turkey (1.59 million), Pakistan (1.51 million), Lebanon (1.15 million), Iran (982,000), Ethiopia (659,000), Jordan (654,100), Kenya (551,400), Chad (452,900), Uganda (385,500) and China (301,000). Nearly all of those refugees hosted in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan were Syrian. Between them, these three countries continue to host by far the majority of the world’s now more than 4 million Syrian refugees. In Pakistan and Iran, nearly all were Afghan. Between them, these two countries were hosting the vast majority of the world’s 2.59 million Afghan refugees. The largest refugee population in Sub-Saharan Africa was Somali (1.11 million), but other large refugee populations hosted by Ethiopia, Kenya, Chad and Uganda included Sudanese, South Sudanese, Eritreans, people from the Central African Republic.
11. So far in 2015, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey has risen to over 2 million. The number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon remains over 1 million, and in Jordan remains over 600,000. However, these figures mask the reality for these three countries. Firstly, for several decades Jordan and Lebanon have been hosting very large numbers of Palestinian refugees, who do not fall within UNHCR’s remit (and are included in none of the figures cited elsewhere in this submission, unless expressly stated otherwise). In Jordan, there are more than 2 million of these refugees, and in Lebanon around 450,000 – many accommodated in camps first established in the late 1940s/early 1950s; and some of whom are third or even fourth generation refugees. Particularly, given the degree to which the situation in Syria has deteriorated, it can be of no surprise to the international community if those two countries are wary about the prospect of becoming a long-term host to a new population of refugees.
12. Secondly, there are many unregistered Syrian refugees. Thus, the refugee populations in these three countries will be underestimates. The situation for those unregistered is even more precarious. While the refugee camps and registered population suffer from the continued underfunding of the Syrian crisis response, those unregistered are without access to even this support; and with exclusion from schooling, healthcare and lawful employment, they face increased risks of exploitation and greater pressure to try to move on before any limited financial resources are expired. This pressure is exacerbated by the risk of arrest, detention and *refoulement* particularly facing unregistered refugees – though even registered refugees may face these risks, particularly where procedures are introduced requiring but inhibiting them from renewing registration (as has happened in Lebanon). It should be recalled that Syria has also long been host to more than 500,000 Palestinian refugees, several of whom have also been forced to flee the conflict.
13. The UK is the second biggest country donor to the UN Syrian crisis response, and has rightly called on other governments to do more. On the other hand, at end 2014 the

UK was host to 117,161 refugees and a further 36,383 outstanding asylum claims (some of these claimants will have been refugees too). Taking both together, this constitutes only 1% of the global refugee population under UNHCR's remit. If the 5.1 million Palestinian refugees are included, this falls to less than 0.8%.

Countries most disproportionately affected by hosting or receiving refugees – Europe:

14. There are two key ways in which the impact of the current refugee crisis upon individual European countries may be measured – firstly, in terms of asylum claims received; secondly, in terms of numbers of people transiting or hoping to transit a country.
15. On the first measure, France was the EU country receiving the most asylum claims (52,725) in the first year of this decade. Since then asylum claims in France have risen, but the 64,310 claims received by France in 2014 were by then less than Germany (202,815), Sweden (81,325) and Italy (64,625). From receiving only 2,105 claims in 2010, Hungary's asylum intake had risen to 42,775 in 2014. Over this period, the UK's asylum intake rose from 24,365 to 33,010.³
16. Of course, these figures do not tell the full story because the rate of change in 2015 has been far more dramatic for many countries. In January 2015, Germany (25,035), Hungary (11,925), Sweden (4,895), Italy (4,785), France (4,440) and Austria (4,030) received more asylum claims than the UK (2,785). But the disparity has grown. In July 2015, the number of asylum claims received by these seven countries was Germany (37,530), Hungary (31,285), Sweden (8,070), Italy (8,610), France (5,735), Austria (8,790) and the UK (4,325). Data is not available for months after July for the UK and some of these other countries, but data available for some and for Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands suggests the UK is falling further behind other EU countries.⁴
17. On the second measure, the situation in Greece and the Balkans is most dramatic. Over recent weeks, Greece has been receiving up to 10,000 new arrivals each day. Over 500,000 people have arrived in Greece so far this year, the rate of arrivals has increased through the year. (Italy is still receiving large numbers of new arrivals. So far this year, nearly 150,000 have arrived.) Frontline states are failing or struggling to cope with these arrivals, while the EU response has been inadequate. UNHCR has described the situations in Greece and in the Balkans as “*chaotic*”.⁵ That description tallies with what we also have observed. UNHCR report that 34% of arrivals in Europe are women and children.⁶ As UNHCR, we have observed the elderly, infirm and disabled, pregnant women, very young children and babies undertaking exhausting and dangerous journeys, subjected to the elements, including overnight and in rain, in circumstances where the weather (and sea temperature) is dropping. UNHCR have indicated reports of hypothermia. They have also reported on the vulnerability of women and children to sexual exploitation and violence, including in reception facilities; and highlighted credible reports of children engaging in “*survival*

³ Figures taken from the European Commission's Eurostat database. This gives figures for asylum claimants, which (unlike Home Office statistics) include dependents on claims.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ From UNHCR briefing note of 20 October 2015

⁶ From UNHCR briefing note of 23 October 2015

sex” to pay smugglers. As in Greece and the Balkans, the situation at Calais is also of grave concern with Doctors of the World already having assessed it to be a “humanitarian crisis”.⁷ A critical reason for the inadequacy of the EU response is the refusal of many individual Member States to show solidarity with each other and accept a fair share of responsibility for receiving refugees.⁸ The most recent announcement to provide 50,000 additional reception places in Greece still does not match the scale of the crisis, and continues to leave Greece with a disproportionate share of a responsibility it plainly cannot alone meet.

18. The UK government has been one of those governments that has set its face against accepting any such share. The EU relocation scheme – now intended to relieve Greece, Hungary and Italy of 160,000 Syrian, Iraqi and Eritrean refugees is barely underway and is now dwarfed by the number of arrivals. UNHCR has indicated that up to 70% of those arriving in Greece are Syrian refugees.⁹ There are a large number of Afghans and a smaller but significant number of Iraqis. It is clear that most of these are refugees too. In Italy the arrivals are also mostly Syrian; but here there are also Eritreans and Sudanese, most of whom again will be refugees.¹⁰ The UK is not participating in the relocation scheme and has offered no other means by which it will share in the responsibility of refugees arrived and arriving in Europe other than by the means impliedly suggested by the Home Secretary when she spoke in the House after the Prime Minister’s announcement on Syrian resettlement places:¹¹

“...people are fleeing other parts of the world [than Syria]. The Government take a clear approach to that. People have the ability to come to the UK to seek asylum. Those claims are properly considered, and we grant claims for asylum to people here in the United Kingdom. The UK has always been willing to welcome those who are fleeing conflict and persecution. The situation is no different today from what it has been in the past.”

19. The UK offers no legally-sanctioned route whereby someone can come to the UK to claim asylum. The countries from which come the vast majority of refugees to the UK are all on the UK’s visa list, so there is no option (even if they had a passport) of travelling as a short-term visitor and then making a claim. Thus, refugees wishing to claim asylum in the UK must make their way here by unsanctioned and often dangerous means, often with the assistance of people smugglers. The UK is no different to other EU countries in this respect. It is different inasmuch as it is not receiving refugees (or asylum claims) at the level or rate of increase as other EU countries.

Concluding observations and recommendations:

⁷ See https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/files/Calais_Health_Report.pdf

⁸ Figures given in this paragraph are taken from UNHCR, but data from IOM and FRONTEX confirms these numbers. However, note the latter’s calculation of unsanctioned crossing of EU external borders has been shown to include double counting.

⁹ From UNHCR briefing note of 2 October 2015

¹⁰ Our assessment that the clear majority of these nationals are refugees is based on a combination of factors – the high success rates across the EU of asylum claims made by persons of these nationalities, our expert knowledge of the relevant country conditions on which we research and report and UNHCR’s and others’ assessment which reach this same conclusion.

¹¹ *Hansard* HC, 8 Sep 2015 : Column 257

20. We append the three page briefing we previously supplied to the Committee during the time of its Calais inquiry.
21. We have discussed several numbers in this submission, and there is much discourse elsewhere on numbers. However, some of that discourse is prone to exaggeration including by double or more counting. Assertions by FRONTEX as to the numbers of arrivals likely to be received from Libya during the course of 2015 have clearly not materialised.¹² FRONTEX have also confirmed double counting of persons entering Greece and then entering Hungary.¹³ Similar misunderstandings and incorrect presentation has occurred in relation to instances of stopping people making unsanctioned crossings of the Channel from Calais – where individuals stopped several times in any particular period have been reported as if each ‘stop’ referred to a separate individual.
22. We draw attention to related inquiries being conducted by the International Development Committee and the EU (Home Affairs) Select Committee, and recommend coordination of work as between these committees. Just as this crisis requires a comprehensive response (from all EU Member States and others), so would comprehensive understanding and recommendations from these committees be of particular value.
23. In any event, we recommend that the UK government be called upon to engage and participate with its partners in Europe in responding to this crisis, including by offering to receive a fair share of refugees arrived and arriving in Europe. There is no lawful returning of refugees to their countries of origin, and it is neither safe nor practical to return refugees to countries of transit in Europe, which are struggling with much greater numbers and/or are affected by social and political instability or conflict. Similarly, simply returning refugees to, or backing up refugees in, countries of transit beyond Europe’s borders risks violating international legal obligations, subjecting people to heightened risks of human rights abuses and fuelling instability in poorer countries which are already carrying much the greater share of responsibility for hosting refugees.
24. A key aspect of a coordinated European response urgently needs to provide for safe and legal routes whereby refugees who are compelled to seek safety in Europe can do so.

For further information contact:

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¹² <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/libya-one-million-migrants-ready-reach-europe-says-eu-border-chief-1490831>

¹³ <https://theconversation.com/seeing-double-how-the-eu-miscounts-migrants-arriving-at-its-borders-49242>