

Unit 21. European Refugee Crisis in a Nutshell



Huge number of refugees and migrants have been shifting to Europe, from many countries like Syria, particularly since 2011. They see European Union (EU) as their asylum. With more number of refugees coming in at a time when the natives don't want any more, the whole situation has developed into a crisis. This crisis is called European Refugee Crisis.

The refugees are not only from Syria!

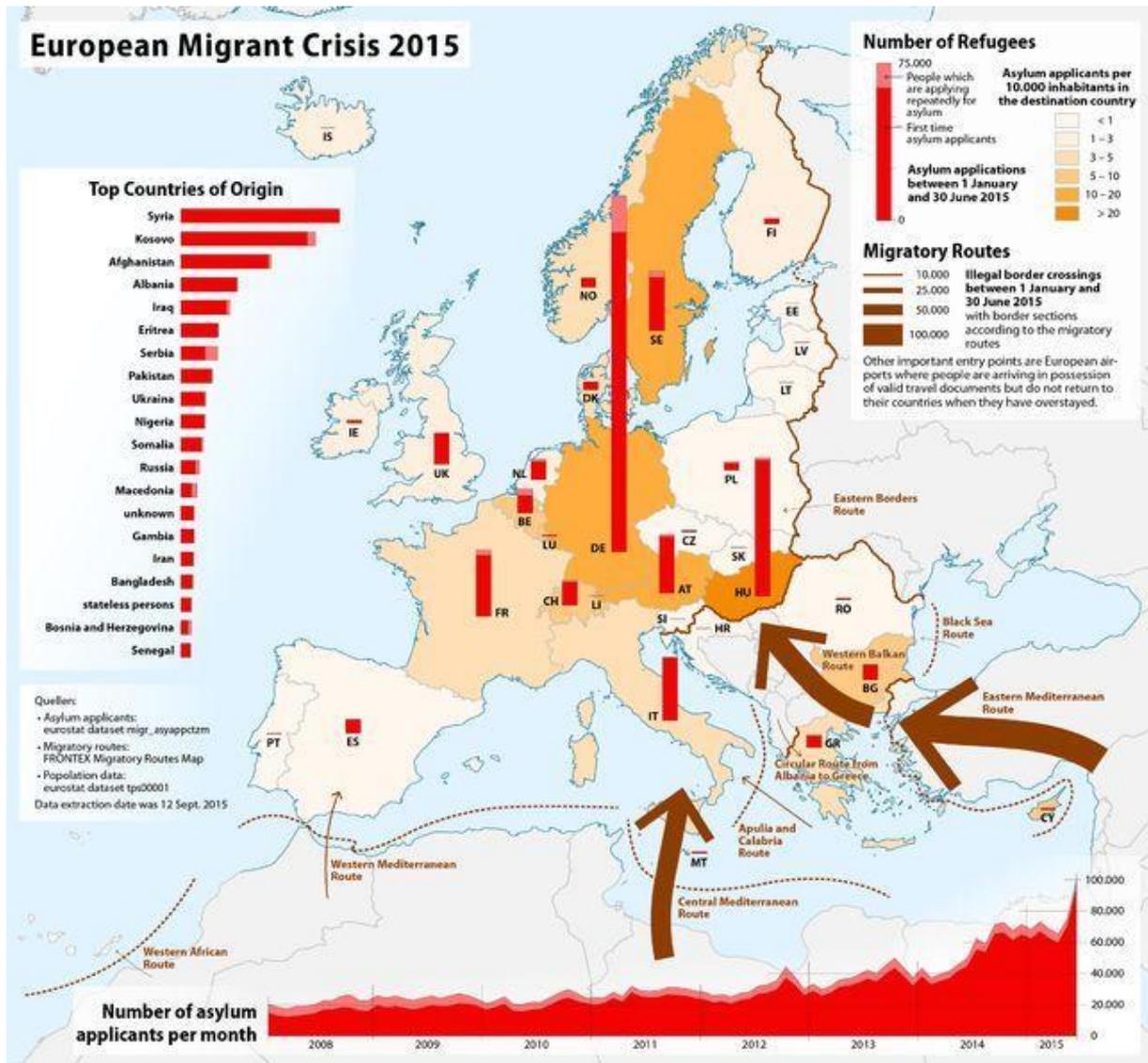
More than 5 Lakh people have crossed to Europe by sea and land. Most of them are from Syria – troubled not only by civil war, but also by the most violent and inhumane atrocities by ISIS. But Syria is not the single source. They come from areas such as the Middle East (Syria, Iraq), Africa (Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Gambia), South Asia and Central Asia. According to International Organisation for Migration (IOM) statistics, a substantial number of refugees are also from Afghanistan and Pakistan too due to unending civil conflicts in these countries.

The phrase “European migrant crisis” became widely used in April 2015, when five boats carrying almost two thousand migrants to Europe sank in the Mediterranean Sea, with a combined death toll estimated at more than 1,200 people.

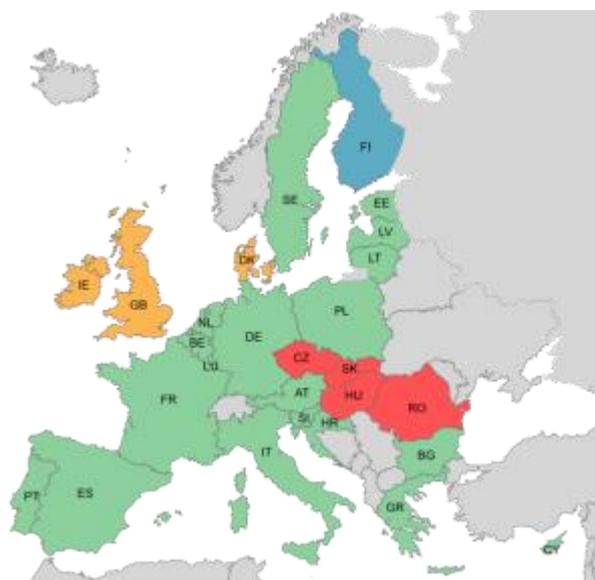
Migrants and Refugees – Statistics

- According to UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, 59.5 million people were forcibly displaced in 2014 which again rose considerably in 2015.
- A record number of 1,07,500 migrants reached the borders of European Union in recent months.
- Between 2000 and 2015, around 30, 000 have perished along these borders.

This figures stand as a witness that this crisis didn't started only after ISIS emerged. The increasing number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Europe is seen as a dangerous growing trend among refugees. In 2014 alone around 24,000 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum. Many of the children who arrive are at the age group of 15 to 17 with no formal schooling adding more headaches to host countries.



The European Response to Migrant Crisis



Germany and the EU have been pushing for other EU members to work out a plan for asylum seekers. Britain leads among countries which strictly rejects it. The Right-Wing PM of Hungary has appealed to refugees not to try and cross into Hungary which has fenced its borders with razor wire. Bulgaria, Czech, Slovakia and Poland all are reluctant in taking of refugees making the situation grave. Germany is expected to give green signal to almost 1 million applicants for asylum. After extensive criticisms by Media on Refugee crisis, EU has started to take few favourable steps. Initially Europe greeted immigrants with barbed wires, tear gas and police brutality. Only after huge outcry across International media and from human rights and progressive organisations within Europe, eased the curbs on refugees.

Aylan: Another incident which helped to garner pro- refugee sentiments was photo of dead child Aylan on a beach. A mishap happened from his father who accidentally dropped him from an overcrowded boat while trying to escape. These photos send jitters across world and thanks to social media which made sure that this photo was seen by everyone who has an account. Also Pope Francis statement that every Church in Europe should take a refugee family has given hope to many that it may change the mood in European Right Wing's mind. Countries have started to take more refugees peacefully now. European people have been welcoming refugees with water, food, shoes and blankets. Though Italy, Greece and Hungary are the frontline countries of reception, most sort after destinations are Germany, Sweden, Austria and Switzerland.

Why Europe?

Europe is the most preferred destination for the people from this war conflicted regions as its economically prosperous, socially secure and has friendly immigration laws. Mostly it's not because refugees are opportunists that they walk to EU but it's due to dangerous situation they and their families has to live. Endless wars, conflicts have ruined their countries political, economic and social equilibrium. Also it's surprising why GCC countries never have been helpful or receptive to refugee crisis especially when it's happening in their backyard. Rich countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar has to play more pro- active roles in this situation. So obviously Europe as nearest land seems to be their immediate hope to go as they can trek or use boats or ships to reach.

Macro level causes for Refugee Crisis

- **West:** A short and quick look into history will show you that countries who are responsible for this situation are the ones who have to bear pain of this crisis i.e Europe or to put in a cliché 'West' inclusive of US. Middle East can be said as the holy grail of West since oil was accidentally found by two American gentlemen in Saudi Arabia. No doubt it was a boon to natives and even to millions of Asian and African immigrants to Middle East but also it paved the way to unending geo-political crisis across the region. Before finding oil just like Asia and Africa European colonialism had sucked all its wealth and when time came to leave the place like everywhere, Imperial powers left without solving issues created by them mainly land disputes within neighbours. Example is Israel and Palestine issue.
- **Dictatorship regimes and Islamic fundamentalism:** Continuous dictatorship type regimes and Islamic fundamentalism made Middle East most volatile n disturbed place on the planet. Western powers in order to make their oil supply

smooth and to be part of Gulf Boom started in early 80's always took a partial stand on these issues.

- **Shia-Sunni divide:** Another villain to already worsened situation was Shia-Sunni divide among people, society and regimes which led to many conflicts. This reason has led many natives to flee as refugees in the past from Palestine, during Iraq-Iran war, Iraq-Kuwait war etc.
- **Wars:** This refuge crisis has given Europe a reality check on its wars on many regions of MENA (Middle East and North African region). Wars on these lands didn't ease the situation even though they were able to kill or defeat dictator leaders. By war, infrastructure and liveable conditions of already abysmal level got more deteriorated. These resulted natives of these lands to search green pastures which happened to be Europe and hence started Refugee crisis.
- **Democracy movements and civil war:** Present refugees crisis didn't started yesterday but it has been seen a huge surge from Libya conflict. If we go again back refugee problem as a crisis started from US, UK joint war to liberate Iraq.
- **ISIS:** Emergence of ISIS just sky rocketed the whole thing. Western powers in a way failed to bring stable regimes to these lands. People in a way got sandwiched between atrocities of ISIS or ineffective regimes backed by West on one side and on the other side hunger, poverty and tyranny. Only way to survive for them was to initiate long walk towards Europe! Thus started one of the biggest Exoduses ever seen in history.

Adding fuel to fire

1. Saudi Arabia has been attacking and bombing Yemen.
2. Asylum denied refugees may join ISIS.
3. Turkey's intolerance with Kurds

Syrian Conflict have been going on for 4 years but why suddenly this crisis?

- War in Syria against ISIS is not getting any better. It made Syrians to leave their country to Turkey which is closest and they thought once war is over, they can return.
- Even though Turkey has taken 2 million refugees, it's not a country for people to stay in the long run as Right to work for refugees are not legal yet. Also new regime of Turkey is also not quite favourable to refugees as previous government. It has made refugees reluctant to go to Turkey.
- UN organisations working with millions of refugees in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon are running short of funds to keep up the relief work and expenses of camp making people to think of going to Europe. Similar is the situation among UN camps catering to the needs of refugees in Eastern Europe.
- Many people have saved required money to use legally or illegally to get into Germany.
- People have familiarised with the route via Balkan to trek to EU.
- EU countries have been sitting as a lame duck all this year's talking, discussing on refugee crisis without sensing urgent need of a solution or to deal with such a situation.
- Still EU should understand that what they are facing now is just a tip of iceberg compared to neighbouring countries of Syria when it comes to dealing with refugees.

Conclusions with Possible Solutions

West in a way with its narrow minded Foreign Policy have destabilized West Asia and Middle East and now cannot show their back on refugee crisis.

- Europe should include US which has been largely elusive on whole issue till now.
- GCC countries should involve more in accepting refugees. It's a blunder what Saudi Arabia is doing right now by attacking and bombing Yemen currently which will only add more refugees.
- If Europe is going to push back the refugees, the situation will be more vicious. Such a stupidity will increase the chances of refugees joining with ISIS as they won't have any other options to survive.
- Turkey should end its anonymity with Kurds and involve them more into finding a solution and to defeat ISIS.
- Assad regime should be made more accountable.
- Include Russia and organise an all-out war against ISIS.

Finding a formula based solution which will end all tyranny is not practical but it's time that Europe and US sit together and re-check their neo imperialistic and double faced foreign policies in West Asia and Middle East. Also Western powers should stop Saudi Arabia from funding Wahhabis ideology being spread in Middle East society which is resulting in more Islamic fundamentalism helping organisations like ISIS and Boko—Haram.

To all those who oppose to support refugees, ***“Recognize yourself in he and she who are not like you and me.”*** – Carlos Fuentes.

Questions to ponder:

1. *“A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Refugee crisis”. Analyse the reasons of the refugee crisis faced by Europe. Do you think the response of the western world as adequate to tackle the situation?*
2. West in a way with its narrow minded foreign policy have destabilized West Asia and Middle East and now cannot show their back on refugee crisis. Critically analyse.
3. The European migrant crisis is not entirely Syrian in origin. Discuss.
4. Analyse the impact of European Refugee Crisis on South Asian nations like India.



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