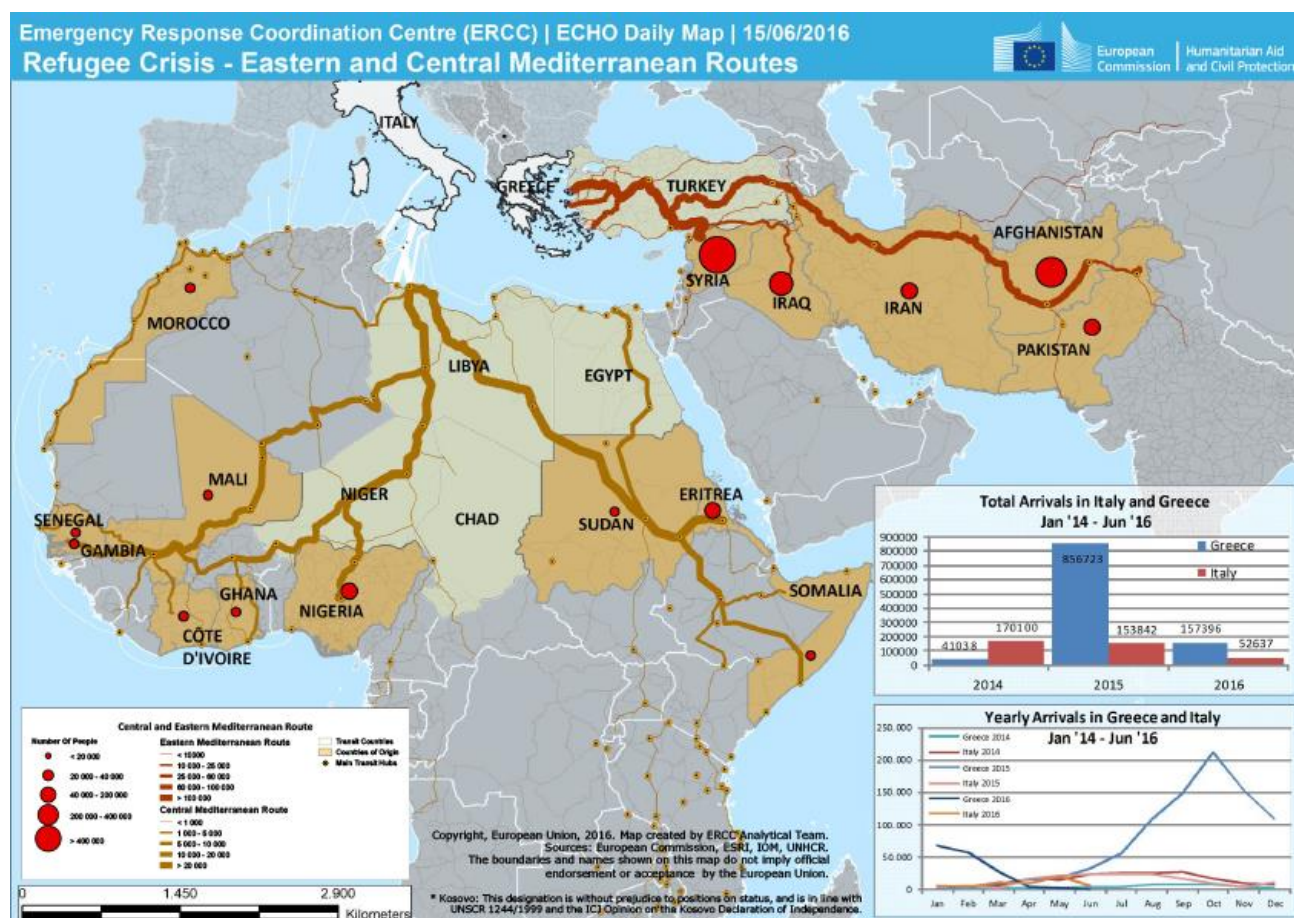


## Refugee crisis in Europe



### The EU's humanitarian and civil protection response

The European Commission has taken a comprehensive approach to tackle the refugee crisis in Europe with its [European Agenda for Migration](#), drawing on the various tools and instruments available at the EU level and in the Member States.

The Commission's humanitarian and civil protection department supports refugees and their host communities in four ways.

#### Providing emergency support within the EU

In April 2016, the European Commission announced an initial €83 million worth of humanitarian funding for [emergency support](#) projects to assist refugees in [Greece](#). The projects address the most urgent humanitarian needs of some 50 000 refugees and migrants currently hosted in over 30 sites in Greece.

The emergency support funding is made available to Member States whose own response capacities are overwhelmed by urgent and exceptional circumstances, such as the sudden influx of refugees. The assistance is complementary to Member States actions and provided in close coordination with the countries concerned, as well as the Commission humanitarian partner organisations such as UN agencies, non-governmental organisations and international

organisations. This funding can be used for the provision of basic necessities such as food, shelter and medicine.



## Emergency support in Greece

EU funding of **€83 million\*** provides tens of thousands of refugees and migrants in Greece with shelter, food, hygiene, child friendly spaces, education, family reunification assistance and protection.

**EU humanitarian aid partners**

- UNHCR
- Red Cross
- International Rescue Committee
- Danish Refugee Council
- Médecins du Monde
- OXFAM
- Save the Children
- Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund

\*first tranche of total € 300 million of funding for 2016

European Commission | Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

### Helping transit countries with humanitarian funding

The Commission supports refugees in Turkey who have fled violence in both Syria and Iraq, with particular emphasis on vulnerable people living outside of camps. Since the beginning of the Syria crisis in 2011, the Commission has provided a total assistance of €455 million in Turkey, including humanitarian aid and longer-term assistance.

In November 2015, the EU set up the Refugee Facility for Turkey. EU institutions and Member States committed to funding up to €3 billion to be coordinated via the Facility. Over €240 million worth of projects have already been released to date.

Since the beginning the refugee crisis, the Commission has provided humanitarian aid amounting to over €22.5 million to the Western Balkans, notably to Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Aid is channelled via humanitarian partner organisations to the most vulnerable people, and consists of emergency assistance (food, water, hygiene, non-food items, health, basic protection) distributed at transit points such as borders and registration facilities.

In Libya, the Commission has contributed more than €8 million in humanitarian aid since mid-2014, supporting internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups with the provision of protection, health care, cash support, psycho-social assistance, as well as non-food and hygiene items.

### Putting the EU Civil Protection Mechanism at the disposal of Member States and neighbouring countries

Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the Commission coordinates the delivery of immediate material to support Member States and neighbouring countries facing major peaks in the refugee crisis that overwhelm their immediate response capacities. The assistance, provided only upon the request of the affected country, is based on voluntary contributions from countries participating in the Mechanism.

The Mechanism has been activated to help cope with an increased refugee influx several times in 2015 and it is still active in some member states of the mechanism in 2016. Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece have received material assistance such as winterised tents, beds and blankets from the Mechanism participating countries to help them better cope with the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers.

The Mechanism is coordinated by the European Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), which is closely monitoring the refugee crisis and facilitates a coherent and efficient European response.

### Scaling up humanitarian aid for major crises

The EU, together with its Member States, is a leading donor of humanitarian aid in all the major countries and regions, from where refugees currently arriving to the EU originate. This includes Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. In 2015, the European Commission provided over 72% of its annual humanitarian aid budget (over €1 billion) to projects helping refugees and internally displaced persons.

The Commission has stepped up its resources targeted to refugees and internally displaced persons by €200 million for 2015 and €300 million for 2016. This funding is directed to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP) and other organisations – including the Red Cross family and international NGOs – to help refugees especially in and around Syria. At the donors' conference in London in early February 2016, the EU and its Member States pledged further €3 billion to assist the Syrian people inside Syria as well as refugees and the communities hosting them in the neighbouring countries.

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EU humanitarian aid does not address the root causes of displacement and migration, such as conflict, human rights abuses, economic poverty or climate change. This type of aid helps people caught up in or fleeing man-made or natural disasters, wherever they are. The EU's humanitarian assistance goes directly to people in distress, irrespective of their nationality, religion, gender, ethnic origin or political affiliation.

Delivered in line with the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality and humanity, EU humanitarian aid is not a tool for migration management. Humanitarian assistance is provided to victims of conflict and natural disasters according to vulnerability criteria and needs assessments.

## What is Europe doing with the refugee arrivals at its doorstep?

In the last 2 years, Europe has experienced the greatest mass movement of people since the Second World War. More than 1 million refugees and migrants have arrived in the European Union, the large majority of them fleeing from war and terror in Syria and other troubled countries. The EU has agreed on a range of measures to deal with the crisis. These include trying to resolve the root causes of the crisis as well as greatly increasing aid to people in need of humanitarian assistance both inside and outside the EU. **Steps are being taken to relocate asylum seekers already in the EU, resettle people in need from neighbouring countries and return people who don't qualify for asylum.** The EU is improving security at borders with a new border and coast guard, tackling people smuggling and offering safe ways for people to legally enter the EU.

## What is the refugee crisis? What is the EU doing?

Many vulnerable people are coming to the EU to seek asylum. This is a form of international protection that is given to people fleeing their home countries and who can't return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. The EU has a legal and moral obligation to protect those in need. Member States are responsible for examining asylum applications and for deciding who will receive protection.

But not everyone coming to Europe needs protection. Many people leave their home country in an attempt to improve their lives. These people are often referred to as economic migrants, and if they are not successful in their asylum application then national governments have an obligation to remove them to their home country, or another safe country which they have passed through.

Thousands of people have died at sea attempting to reach the EU. Almost 90 % of the refugees and migrants have paid organised criminals and people smugglers to get them across borders. As a result, they are known as 'irregular' migrants — that is, they have not entered the EU through legal means.

Providing people with food, water and shelter is an enormous strain on the resources of some EU Member States. This is especially the case in Greece and Italy, where the vast majority of refugees and migrants first arrive in the EU. Many of these people eventually want to reach other EU countries such as Germany or Sweden. This has caused problems too in Member States which migrants have been passing through in order to get to their final destination, for example Croatia, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia.

In a large part of the EU — the Schengen area — people are able to move freely without internal border controls, but the flow of refugees has caused some Member States to reinstate checks at their borders with other EU countries. Just as the arrival of migrants affects some Member States more than others, the number of asylum applications is not evenly spread among them. In 2015, 75 % of all asylum applications were registered in just five Member States (Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Austria and Italy).

The EU has also reached an agreement with Turkey aimed at halting the uncontrolled flow of migrants across one of the major routes in the Aegean Sea. The agreement also provides legal ways for refugees to enter Europe. The numbers of refugees and migrants coming from Turkey have been significantly reduced as a result. From a peak of around 7 000 per day in October 2015, the average number arriving was brought down to 47 per day by the end of May 2016.

## Providing humanitarian assistance and development aid

In total, the EU has dedicated over €10 billion from the EU budget to dealing with the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016. Many people arrive in the EU needing basics such as clean water, food and shelter. The EU is financing projects to address the most urgent humanitarian needs of the 50 000 refugees and migrants hosted in Greece as of May 2016.

The EU also provides humanitarian aid to refugees and migrants in countries outside the EU, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Turkey hosts by far the biggest number of refugees — about 3 million in total, of whom 2.5 million are Syrian. In order to support refugees in Turkey, the EU and its Member States are providing €6 billion through a dedicated facility between 2016 and 2018.

## Saving lives at sea and protecting the EU's borders

The EU has increased its capacity to carry out search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and to tackle criminal networks. By tripling the available resources, it helped save over a quarter of a million lives in 2015.

The EU Member States agreed in June 2016 to establish a new European Border and Coast Guard to reinforce the management and security of the EU's common external borders.

The European Police Office has opened a new European Migrant Smuggling Centre to support EU Member States in dismantling criminal networks involved in organised migrant smuggling.

## Relocation, resettlement and return

**Based on a European Commission proposal, Member States have agreed for the first time to relocate 160 000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU countries by September 2017.** However, as of July 2016, only 3 000 asylum seekers have been relocated. National governments need to step up the pace of this scheme to help those in need of protection.

The EU also wants to create safe and legal ways for asylum seekers to enter the EU so that they don't have to risk their lives and life savings by turning to smugglers and traffickers. A voluntary resettlement programme agreed by the EU Member States envisages the transfer of 22 500 people from outside the EU to an EU Member State.

The EU has increased the rate of returns of irregular migrants with no right to stay in the EU to their home country. Member States have agreed to apply the rules on return more actively, and the EU border agency will assist them by coordinating return flights.

## Agreement with Turkey

The EU and Turkey agreed in March 2016 that irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving on the Greek islands from Turkey may be returned to Turkey. For every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands after an irregular crossing, the EU will take in a Syrian from Turkey who has not sought to make this journey in an irregular way. Return operations have started from the Greek islands to Turkey, in parallel with resettlement flights directly from Turkey to the EU Member States.

The EU has set up reception centres in Greece and Italy to help the authorities in these countries to manage the migration flows. It has also sent experts to help register people arriving and to coordinate the return of some migrants to their country of origin.

The EU will also look for partnerships with countries that refugees and migrants come from in order to save lives, increase returns, enable migrants and refugees to stay closer to home and, in the long term, help the development of those countries in order to address the root causes of irregular migration. The EU proposes to devote €8 billion to this programme in the period up to 2021.

### **Reforming EU rules on asylum**

Although the EU started to develop a common asylum policy in 1999, the rules were never designed to cope with a massive number of people arriving in a short space of time. New proposals are now on the table from the Commission to revise the existing laws in line with current and future needs. The basic principle will remain the same — people should apply for asylum in the first EU Member State they enter unless they have family elsewhere — but whenever a Member State is overwhelmed, there must be solidarity and a fair sharing of responsibility within the EU.