

# The Refugee Crisis

## Information sheet



### What is the Refugee Crisis?

**The Refugee Crisis** is the so-called phenomenon of the hundreds of thousands of refugees that cross the Mediterranean Sea since 2013 and the political response on this of the receiving countries. Refugees have come to Europe from countries like Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Nigeria, fleeing from war, suppressing political systems or other circumstances that restricted their freedom to live in dignity.

Terms as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker' and 'stateless' are often used interchangeably. Here's a refreshment of what they actually mean.

At the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, a legally recognized **refugee** is defined as someone who is *"owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."* In 2011 the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) made the following addition to this definition: *"who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order."*

An **asylum seeker** is the name for a person who fled their home country because of war or other factors harming them or their family, enters another country and applies for asylum, i.e. international protection, in this other country. An asylum seeker is an immigrant who was affected by forced displacement and may become a recognized refugee.

A **stateless** is a person who is not considered as a national by any state, under the operation of its law. In other words, a stateless doesn't have citizenship. The paradox of human rights is that those are supposed to protect people like stateless who are possibly in the worst human conditions, but only formal citizens can recall on the UN Human Rights. Worldwide, there are over 10 million people unable to enjoy the rights, freedoms, and protections that citizens of a state take for granted.

### Why is this a shared social concern?

Without an official residential status, refugees or asylum seekers are restricted in their freedom by the receiving countries. They're legally not allowed to permanent labor, which makes the majority depending on humanitarian aid for their basic needs. In many countries, this responsibility is on the shoulders of local NGO's, who mainly work with volunteers.

In 2019, the European Union countries had a total population of 513,417,676. There were **2,712,477 refugees** and **721,075 asylum seekers**.



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The refugee crisis asks for a coping with all those incoming migrants in a human dignified way. So far, many governments of the receiving countries have had migration policies and interventions that leave refugees in dehumanizing circumstances. There are plenty of shocking examples of this:

- Refugee camps like Moria on Lesbos, Greece where 13,000 people were forced to live in a camp that was equipped for only 3,000 residents;
- at August 27, 2015 in Austria for instance, a truck was found containing 71 dead refugees from Syria and Afghanistan. They were victims of human smugglers;
- the Dublin Regulation III (2014), that says that a refugee has to apply for asylum in the first country where (s)he has been registered. Because of discrepancy in social policies of European countries, many refugees want to illegally travel to the 'more loyal' countries such as Germany, Belgium or the Netherlands. They become an easy target for human traffickers or smugglers;
- waiting times for asylum seekers to get into the process take months or years, in which social and cultural integration is impossible. For most refugees it takes years until they have legal rights and enter the gate to a new life in safety.

NGO's are trying to help refugees out in refugee camps, asylum seeker- or refugee centers and on the streets of European cities. Nevertheless, their elbow room is sparse, as they have to act within the dehumanizing policies with few resources.

### How can we make a difference?

*On a local level:*

- investigate whether there are any NGO's in your city that do projects for refugees. What are the needs of refugees in your surroundings and how could you serve them?
- Make your volunteer projects inclusive for refugees. Volunteering empowers integration.

*On a national level:* look over your city borders. Maybe there's no refugee center close, but maybe you can mean something for refugees that are living in your country. Find out where they're based and how they're taken care for. See what you can add. For instance, gather with a group of volunteers and write little cards or send cloths or toys for the children.

Try to find an entry to the decision-making field: what is your national government doing for refugees and where do they lack attention?

*On a continental/global level:* Create awareness of people's social responsibility. What is happening in other countries? How are governmental parties acting towards refugees? Use of (social) media to get attention of the people generate political vote.

**Please join our international [Shared Social Concern workgroup](#) on The Refugee Crisis. Let's connect and make a change!**

