



The Global Refugee Crisis

ITUC Special Briefing
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Governments across the world are avoiding responsibility for refugees - Unions say refugees welcome

The world faces the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War but it is the richest governments who have forgotten their history. More than 60 million people are fleeing from war, terror and abject poverty.

With 80 percent of displaced persons remaining in developing countries, Europe and other G20 nations are scrambling to minimise refugee intake. With the exception of Germany and Sweden we are witnessing the construction of walls and military lines on borders to keep desperate human beings from safe haven. In the United States, Canada and Australia, governments have offered to take minimal numbers of Syrian refugees and there is a growing callousness that accepts a rationale to send all others back.

It is true that countries like Greece, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey need more assistance, and the generosity of people in opening their homes and communities to welcome refugees puts governments to shame. But to pay Turkey to keep refugees out of Europe is not and will never be an acceptable solution. It is in breach of fundamental human rights.

People are not tradable commodities.

There can be no integration without relocation. We urge European governments to reopen their discussions on resettlement and integration instead of putting all their efforts into closing the door. Responsibility for refugees cannot simply be traded away.

The European deal with Turkey is a hypocritical attempt to circumvent international obligations. Equally it denies the history of the last century where European refugees were welcomed into the workforces of many nations and, with a social compact, saw jobs grow and economies prosper.

Many countries, including in Europe, need workers as their populations age. The skills and incomes refugees can contribute to host nations boosts economic growth and job creation to the benefit of refugees and host communities alike. But it requires investment. It's time for leaders to pay more attention to the state of the economy and employers and unions to agree that migrants and refugees are a part of the solution.

But at the core of this crisis are people. The ITUC and the ETUC are appalled by the lack of unity and humanity in government policies.

The heartening fact is that in almost all nations the compassion of people is ahead of that of their governments. 73 percent of people in a Tent Foundation¹ ten-country poll acknowledged their responsibility to accept refugees.

The ITUC is petitioning the UN, the G7 and the G20 to support the right to safe haven and work for all migrants. This requires a global, cooperative resettlement strategy and the global funds vital for social protection and the infrastructure to meet refugees' needs in host nations.

The dispersal of refugees is paramount so as not to create areas that will soon become areas without rights.

The failure to demonstrate the solidarity that values human life is abhorrent and the growing xenophobia in the political realm is distressing. Fear-mongering about new arrivals threatening to take jobs, without action to ensure equal treatment in the workplace or any serious plan to improve infrastructure, grow jobs and produce growth to build a better future and provide opportunities for all, is short-sighted.

While governments across the world avoid responsibility for refugees, unions say refugees welcome.

Every democratic country can do better to ensure safe haven for people at risk, but so too must our leaders act to bring an end to conflict and displacement. Just as we declare that refugees are welcome we acknowledge that most want peace and security in their own homes. An urgent global effort to stop the bombs and ensure democracy in Syria and neighbouring countries is long overdue.

Sharan Burrow
ITUC General Secretary

Luca Visentini
ETUC General Secretary



¹ Tent Foundation Global Poll, November 2015 of adult populations in Australia, Canada, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, UK, USA

Trade Unions, Business, Civil Society Recommendations to Address the Refugee Crisis

Trade unions are appalled by the lack of collective action in response to the global refugee crisis.

Labour 20, Business 20, and Civil Society 20 at the 2015 G20 Summit agreed a joint commitment for action on the refugee crisis calling on G20 countries to take concrete policy actions to:

- Increase funding for refugee needs and social protections in host nations;
- Recognise the right of refugees to work in the formal economy with requisite labour, social, political and cultural rights, including the freedom to associate, and enact measures to make these rights reality.
- Contribute to global efforts and develop a common strategy to resettle the people who are forced to flee to neighbouring countries.
- Acknowledge the skills and incomes refugees can contribute to host nations and support investment that boosts economic growth and job creation to the benefit of refugees and host communities alike.
- Recognise that reasons for mass displacement are often interrelated and can range from violence and armed conflict to lack of decent work and that effective response must address the root causes of forced migration in addition to meeting the resulting humanitarian, resettlement, and integration needs.
- Support an urgent global effort to stop the bombs and ensure democracy in Syria.

Yusuf, Construction worker, Cappadocia, Turkey

Syrian Refugee, Married, 26 years old

The bombs made me leave. One year ago I left with my mother. My father and brother died in the war. I had a friend here who said I could get a job.

The job is good. The people are nice. People here work. In Syria there is no work because of the war. All Syrians are brothers but we are in a war.

Every day 200 – 300 people come to Turkey. Assad must go. He throws the bombs. He is not human.

The bombs are long—1 metre by 1.5 metres. There are small pieces of iron in them.



Hussein, Cemel Ranch Hand, Cappadocia, Turkey

Syrian Refugee, 14 years old

I miss Aleppo. My mother says both sides are to blame for the war. There is no one else to blame. But I'll go back when I can. I had horses in Syria, but my house was demolished. My father died but that was before the war.

I took a bus here with my mother, baby sister, my uncle and aunt and their baby. It took us a day.

That was a year ago. I went to school for five years in Aleppo, but I can't read or write. Before I left I was fixing washing machines and things.

Here on the ranch, I take care of the horses, feeding and cleaning them. I can ride the horses. I've learnt Turkish but I don't go to school. They tried to make me but I wanted to work with the horses.

I'm the only one working, my sister is only 10. I look after my family. I don't know if we get any help, maybe my mother knows, I'm only a boy.

We live in a house with four or five families. There are about 200 people from Syria around here.



Facts about the refugee crisis

Europe

According to the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), 187,631 people have arrived in Europe by sea in 2016. 1,357 are dead or missing.

More than 100,000 people arrived in Greece and Italy in January and February 2016 alone, a significantly higher number of people than during the same period in 2015.

On average 2,000 new migrants are registered each day in Greece.

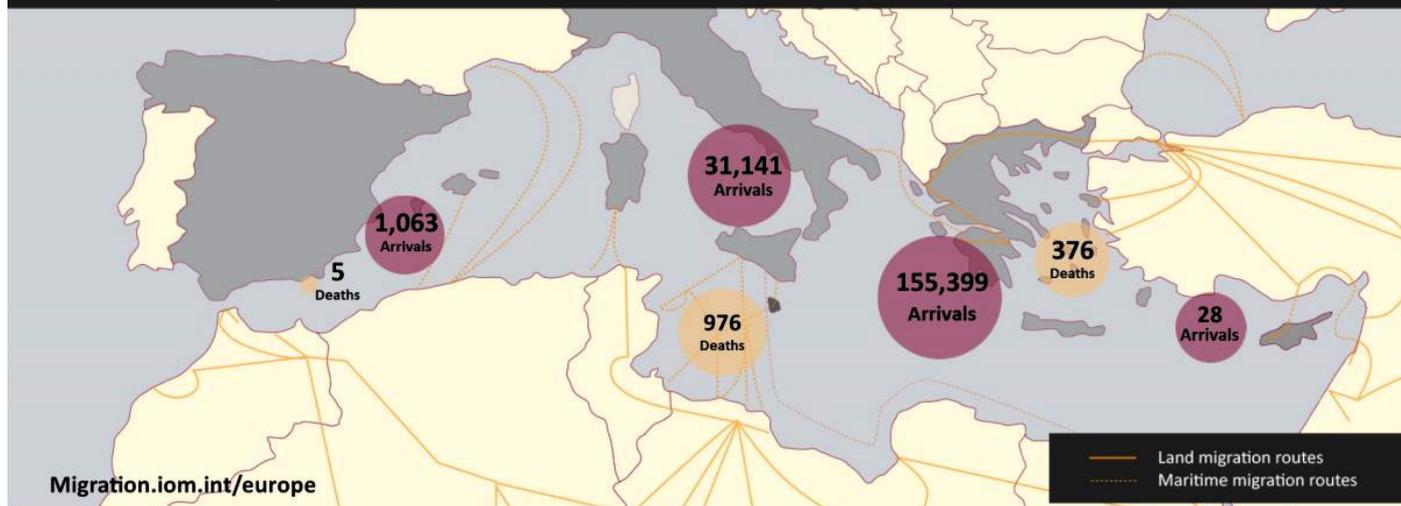
Several countries in Europe have enacted border controls to stop people fleeing, leaving thousands of migrants stranded.

48 percent of more than one million refugees and migrants who arrived in the EU in 2015 are from Syria.

1, 011,712
ARRIVALS IN 2015

187,631 ARRIVALS BY SEA IN 2016
1,357 DEAD/MISSING

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SEA ARRIVALS DATA to 8 MAY
DATA FOR SPAIN TO 31 MARCH



Luca Visentini, ETUC General Secretary

“The ETUC denounces the political standstill created by governments that respond to xenophobic minorities that keep EU societies stuck in fear and make progress impossible. The trade union movement does not tolerate any form of discrimination or xenophobia that discredits European values in our societies.

Full equal treatment in the labour market and equal access to social services for local workers and migrants, and quality job opportunities for all, are the fundamental basis for fair integration and inclusion of refugees.”

The ETUC is organising a conference in Rome on 15 June to press for equal treatment and integration of refugees. Over 250 participants are expected and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and EU Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, Dimitris Avramopoulos have been invited.



Global

86 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries.

50 per cent of the world's refugees in 2014 were children.

Figures from the UNHCR show that nearly 60 million people were displaced from their homes by the end of 2014. Half of the displaced are children.

Due to the five year long civil war, Syria is the major country of origin for people who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon as well as the EU.

At least a quarter of a million children are living under brutal siege in areas of Syria that have effectively been turned into open-air prisons.

In Syria half of the population has been forced to flee their homes, with 6.6 million people displaced inside Syria and another 4.7 million refugees seeking safety and assistance in neighbouring countries, and increasingly in Europe.

Officially, Lebanon is home to almost 1.2 million refugees, but unofficial estimates put it at more than 1.5 million. Syrian refugees in Lebanon are highly vulnerable to exploitation and forced labour.

Nearly 14 million people were newly displaced in 2014. Turkey, Iran and Pakistan host the largest numbers of refugees.

One in four refugees are hosted in developing countries which are not their country of origin.

Tefere Gebre, AFL-CIO Executive Vice President

“Refugees look like me, I want to ask you and urge you to reject the fear, the politics of xenophobia, the politics of Islamophobia and with open arms welcome refugees like myself, to your home, to our country and to our communities.”



Trade Unions and Refugees

Trade unions from across Europe and throughout the world have been at the forefront of welcoming and ensuring safe haven for refugees, and for their integration into the workforce. Unions have opened up their residential facilities to take in refugees and organised supplies of food and other essentials to help feed and clothe those who have arrived. They have mobilized their members in community activities to support refugees, delivered aid across borders and been at the forefront of public solidarity mobilisations and strikes where refugees are being exploited at work. They are helping undocumented refugees, including recognizing their status as workers with a union card. They are campaigning successfully for thousands of people to get documentation, permanent residency and decent jobs. Unions are also negotiating with employers and governments to get tripartite agreements for integrating refugees into the workforce. Ordinary working people, with their unions, are showing that even when governments fail to accept their responsibilities, solidarity and compassion will help fill the void of official neglect.

Conclusion

Governments have failed to deal with waves of economic migration from Latin America, Asia and Africa, failed to deal with asylum seekers fleeing conflict and oppression and now a new wave of refugees from the war in Syria is exposing deep fault lines between nations.

Germany and Sweden stand out in their support for humanity, but right across Europe and indeed in other continents we witness a lack of generosity to increase intakes of migrants despite the economic evidence that asylum is a neutral cost over time and that, with employment migration is a net gain.

The reality is that it is no longer possible to distinguish or divide categories of migrants seeking safety and security in another nation. All people are entitled to equal rights.

Rights, with the right to work a priority, and social protection are vital guarantees for both individuals and the host communities to reap the benefits

migrants bring and ensure the social stability that sustains development.

Solidarity and support for both safe haven and social protection must also be afforded to developing economies struggling to cope with millions of additional people in their nations.

The value of human life must triumph over fear and xenophobia. Unions have a central role to play in fighting against walls, military borders and the callous response that ignores the deaths of migrants. Union belief in solidarity and the dignity of decent work is essential to shape an inclusive future for all people.

Trade unions are campaigning for refugees to have safe haven and the right to decent work. We salute all those union members, their families and their communities who have opened their hearts, and we call upon all to follow their example in particular on June 20, World Refugee Day.