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STRATEGIES FOR REFUGEES

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Image courtesy of www.languageonthemove.com

Strategies for Refugees is an Erasmus + funded project that is working to identify good practices for refugee integration across Europe.

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The “Human Cost” of The EU’s Response to the Refugee Crisis

By Priyanka Boghani

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Source: www.pbs.org

By the time the first week of 2018 had ended, the Mediterranean Sea had already taken a deadly toll. A rubber dinghy sank off the coast of Libya while carrying 150 migrants and refugees from across Africa. Just eight bodies, all women, were recovered. Another 56 went missing, disappearing beneath the waves. The remaining survivors were pulled from the water and brought to Italy.

It was an ominous start to the new year. Rickety boats and rubber dinghies sinking into the Mediterranean have become a distressingly common sight throughout the ongoing migration crisis. Less than a month into 2018, more than 200 people have already died or gone missing at sea, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

As the crisis enters its third year, Europe continues to struggle with how to respond to an influx that has seen more than one-and-a-half million refugees and migrants come to its shores — and nearly 12,000 perish or go missing attempting the journey.

Since the crisis began, the European Union has spent millions discouraging people from making the journey, funding and supporting countries that have become main points of entry, and speeding up the return of people to their countries of origin. While these measures have contributed to a steep decline in arrivals to the continent, rights groups and humanitarian organizations say they have also had unintended consequences. For some, the journey to Europe has grown increasingly deadly, while others are now stuck in nations where they are vulnerable to human rights abuses.

“I’m sure plenty of people will say it’s a success, but at what cost?” said François Crépeau, a professor at McGill University who served as U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants from 2011 to 2017, of the drop in overall arrivals. “There’s a human cost to all this.”

The EU Response

The sudden influx of those escaping violence, persecution and poverty starting in 2015 triggered a series of reactions from individual governments in Europe. One by one, countries along the primary route taken by asylum seekers to Western Europe — Hungary, Slovenia, Austria and Macedonia — tightened their borders. Politicians who had initially been sympathetic to refugees adopted harder stances as public backlash grew and elections drew near.

Amid pressure to act, the European Union moved to stem the flow. In March 2016, it struck a controversial deal with Turkey, one of the main transit hubs along the eastern Mediterranean route, particularly for those fleeing war-torn Syria. Anyone — refugee or migrant — who tried to cross from Turkey to Greece outside of proper channels would be sent back. For every Syrian sent back to Turkey, the EU would accept one refugee.

In February 2017, the EU took aim at the central Mediterranean route, popular among those fleeing from Africa and arriving in Italy. It gave \$245 million to the internationally recognized government in Libya — itself beset by conflict and politically instability — to stop boats from leaving the country’s territorial waters. As part of the agreement, the EU would provide training and equipment to the Libyan coast guard, seek to ensure “adequate” conditions for migrants inside of Libya, and support the voluntary returns of people to their countries of origin. Italy also inked a deal with Libya, providing an additional \$245 million, and increasing training and cooperation with Libya’s coast guard.

The sharpest declines happened along the Turkey to Greece route, which saw a drop of 97 percent between 2015 and 2017, per UNHCR. Arrivals in Italy fell almost 35 percent from a record high in 2016.



The EU framed its response as an effort to strengthen cooperation and support for transit countries like Turkey and Libya, saying they would break the business model of smugglers and help save lives.

These deals and border closures have helped precipitate dramatic declines in the overall flow of refugees and migrants coming to Europe by sea. Arrivals have fallen by nearly 85 percent, dropping from more than one million in 2015 to 171,300 last year, according to data from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Deaths at Sea

As with arrivals, the total number of deaths is also down, dropping from a high of more than 5,000 in 2016, to slightly more than 3,000 last year.

Yet critics point out that the number of those who either died or went missing at sea has never fallen below 3,000 per year.

In fact, even with fewer people attempting the journey, the risks of dying in the Mediterranean have only grown as smuggling networks employ more dangerous routes and methods using smaller, overcrowded vessels that are not seaworthy.

There was a 1 in 269 chance of dying or going missing at sea for those who crossed the Mediterranean in 2015. The next year, it crept up to a 1 in 71 chance. Last year, the odds rose to 1 in 55.

Experts argue that one reason deaths have continued at such high rates is because the EU response has focused too heavily on stemming arrivals, rather than developing legal alternatives to reach Europe.

“Every time states try to prohibit an activity which is not necessarily considered criminal ... all it does is create underground criminal networks who are bypassing government,” said Crépeau.

“Saving lives, protecting migrants, fight[ing] traffickers and replacing irregular migration with organized, legal and safe pathways are the core objectives of the EU’s migration policy,” a spokesman for the European Commission, the EU’s executive arm, told FRONTLINE in a statement. “The way forward must build on these steps by further enhancing cooperation with our partners in Africa, disrupt the criminal smuggling and trafficking networks, fighting the root causes of irregular migration, helping stranded migrants return home and ensuring the most vulnerable can come to Europe safely.”

The Stranded

Among those who have survived the journey, thousands along the migration route have been stranded since nations began closing their borders. More than 1,300 are stuck in Bulgaria, another 4,400 in Serbia, and 54,000 in Greece, according to IOM figures from last November. The worst conditions at camps inside these countries were described by Doctors Without Borders as “on the brink of a humanitarian emergency.”

On the other side of the Mediterranean, in Libya, conditions are unimaginable, according to humanitarian reports. “Every single person — and it really is that extreme — every single person who has made this journey through Libya describes Libya in one way or another as hell,” said Gauri van Gulik, Amnesty International’s deputy Europe director.

According to Amnesty’s research, tens of thousands are being held in official detention centers or held captive by militias or gangs. A report from December says, “They are systematically exposed to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence and severe beatings and extortion. They are also at times killed or left to die after being tortured, exploited, abused, or sold on for forced labor and other forms of exploitation to other militias, armed groups or criminal gangs.” *(Continued on next page)*



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In November, U.N. Human Rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein called the suffering of migrants in Libya "an outrage to the conscience of humanity." The EU's efforts, he said, "have done nothing so far to reduce the level of abuses suffered by migrants."

"The EU is extremely active in doing everything we can to provide protection and alternatives to migrants and refugees in Libya," the European Commission told FRONTLINE, adding that it was EU funding that allowed 20,000 people to voluntarily return home from Libya since January 2017.

But aid groups say that EU support of the Libyan coast guard has led to more interceptions of boats, which results in migrants and refugees being sent back to Libya, where they're vulnerable to abuse. Critics say this has presented new challenges for Western aid groups and humanitarian organizations.

Luca Salerno, Doctors Without Borders' project coordinator onboard the rescue ship Aquarius, said there have been incidents where the ship has been told to stand by while a boat was in need of rescue, in order to allow the Libyan coast guard to intervene instead. On one occasion, he said, the rescue ship waited almost four hours in front of a rubber boat in distress, because they weren't allowed to carry out the rescue.

"The situation can become critical at any moment," he said. "To wait three, four hours in front of a rubber boat without authorization to intervene — it was an extremely risky situation."

The European Commission said the EU does not send migrants back to Libya. "What we do is to train the Libyan coast guard, since the vast majority of people were dying in Libyan territorial waters — to which we do not have access," a spokesperson said, adding that training emphasizes human rights, women's rights and the correct handling of migrants.

EU member states have pledged to receive around 40,000 refugees by May 2019, but the need is vast. Turkey, which was the transit point for more than 800,000 people heading to Europe in 2015, now hosts 3.6 million refugees, 3.3 million of them of Syrian origin.

"Sooner or later, we will need to deal with the fact that these people continue to flee their countries of origin, even if they don't reach Europe," said Eugenio Ambrosi, director of the IOM's regional office for the EU, Norway and Switzerland. "We're talking about thousands of people that move out of desperation. And if you're desperate, yes, you might know that you're going to risk your life or run into serious trouble, but you're already in serious trouble back home so you have nothing to lose."

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-human-cost-of-the-eus-response-to-the-refugee-crisis/>

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Syrian Refugees in the UK

A factual report from fullfact.org by By Joël Reland

23rd February 2018

The government has said it aims to resettle 23,000 refugees in the UK from Syria and the surrounding region by 2020. So far, just over 11,000 refugees have come under two resettlement schemes, the first of which began in earnest in September 2015.

Prior to July 2017, those arriving on the scheme didn't technically have refugee status in the UK, and instead had "Humanitarian Protection". This gives individuals the right to five years' residence in the UK, but not the full range of rights (such as access to benefits and support for Higher Education) that someone with refugee status has.

Of the 23,000 target, 20,000 are specifically from the conflict in Syria. The other 3,000 are vulnerable children and their families in the Middle East and North Africa.

These schemes aren't the only way for refugees to enter the UK. Another 8,000 Syrian asylum seekers have been granted asylum after applying in the UK since 2011.

The Home Secretary yesterday claimed that the government is "slightly ahead of schedule" in meeting the target to resettle 20,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict by 2020. This seems to be based on just over half of the target number having been resettled in roughly half the time since the target was set.

Some on the scheme don't have refugee status.

The Home Office told us that everyone who arrives via the government schemes fits the UN's definition of a refugee.

But not all these people were granted refugee status by the UK. Prior to July 2017, they were granted Humanitarian Protection and five years' stay in the UK. The government summarised the difference in status:

"While Humanitarian Protection recognises the need an individual has for international protection, it does not carry the same entitlements as refugee status, in particular, access to particular benefits, swifter access to student support for Higher Education and the same travel documents as those granted refugee status."

Since July 2017, individuals on the scheme have been granted refugee status and five years' stay in the UK. Those who arrived before that date may request a change to refugee status. Refugees in the UK normally get a residence permit for five years, after which they may apply for permanent residence.

For the rest of this piece, we will refer to all people arriving via a government resettlement scheme as a "refugee".

What was the target?

The UK has two different resettlement schemes specifically for refugees from Syria and the surrounding region. Together, these two schemes aim to take in 23,000 people by 2020. Not all of these will necessarily be from Syria, though.

In September 2015, then-Prime Minister David Cameron announced "that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of this Parliament".

The commitment to resettling 20,000 refugees by 2020 expanded the ambitions of the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). Launched in January 2014 to help Syrian refugees, the VPRS had resettled 252 refugees between then and October 2015. (*Continued on next page*)



The scheme is meant to identify, with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “those most at risk and bring them to the UK”. It does not cover Syrian refugees already in Europe.

Since July 2017, refugees of any nationality fleeing the conflict in Syria may be considered for the VPRS.

The government announced a second resettlement scheme in April 2016. It aims to bring 3,000 vulnerable and refugee children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa to the UK by 2020. Now called the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), it covers unaccompanied and separated children, as well as “other vulnerable children such as child carers and those facing the risk of child labour, child marriage or other forms of neglect, abuse or exploitation.”

Those arriving through both schemes are granted five years’ stay in the UK.

These schemes are not the only way enter the UK as a refugee. An individual may apply to the UK as an asylum seeker. An asylum seeker will then have their case considered by the government, to determine whether or not they are a refugee under international law.

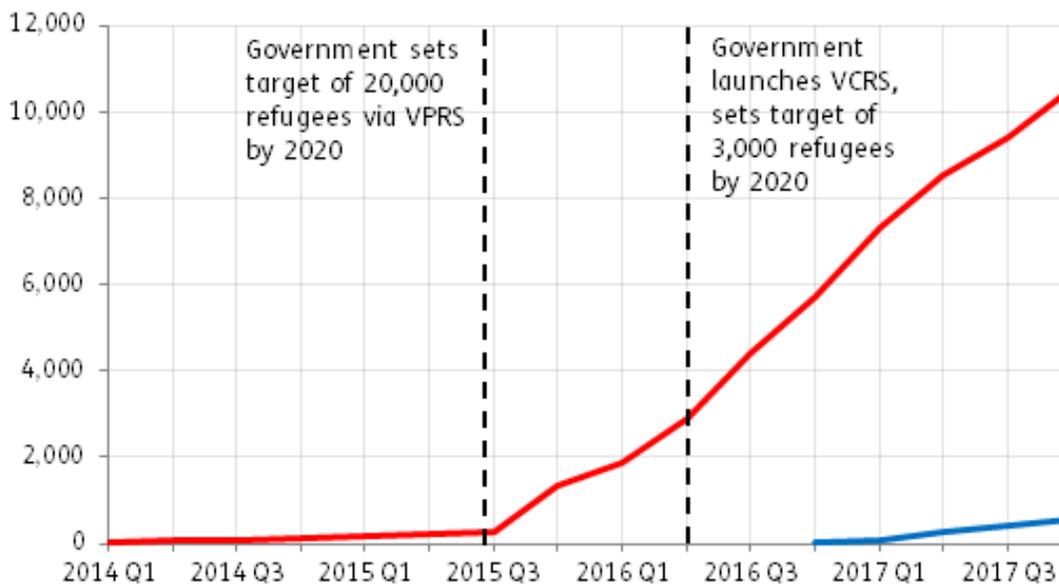
What has happened so far?

Government figures released yesterday show that, by December 2017, roughly 10,500 refugees from the Syrian conflict have been resettled under the VPRS. The vast majority were resettled since September 2015. Almost 5,000 were resettled in 2017, and roughly half of them were children.

570 people have been resettled under the VCRS, 539 of whom were in 2017.

23,000 refugees by 2020?

Cumulative number of refugees arriving in the UK via **Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)** and **Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS)**, 2014-2017



In addition to this, over 8,000 Syrian asylum seekers and their dependants were accepted refugees in the UK from 2011 to 2017. This means they applied for protection in the UK, rather than having been identified through a government scheme. Overall there were an estimated 119,000 refugees in the UK at the end of 2016, according to the UN.

Globally, there are 5.6 million refugees from Syria. 3.5 million are registered in Turkey, and a further two million are in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon according to the UNHCR. 63% of Syrian asylum applications in Europe were made to Germany or Sweden between April 2011 and December 2017.

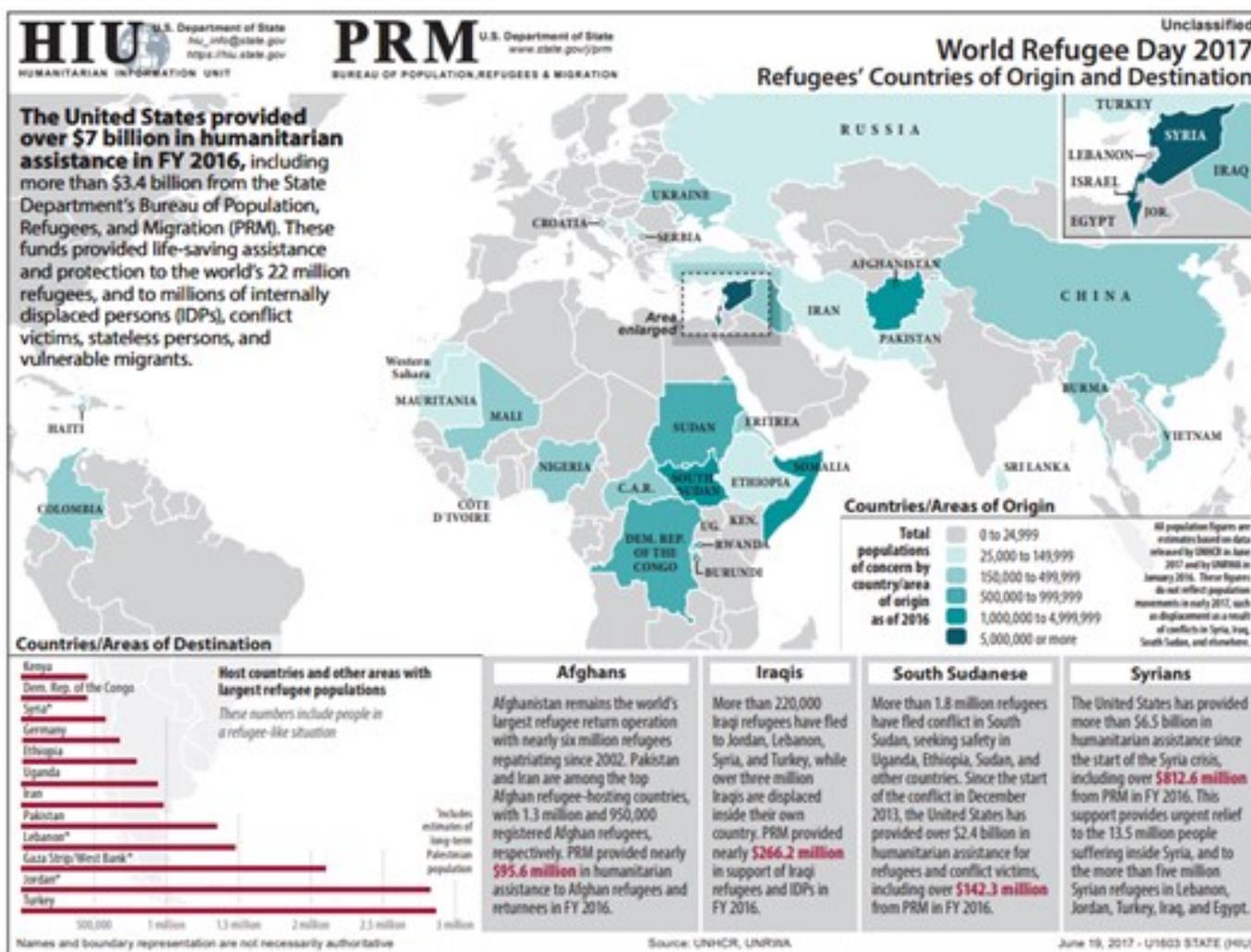
Ahead of schedule?

The Home Secretary yesterday claimed that the government is “slightly ahead of schedule” in meeting the 20,000 target. We asked the Home Office for more information on this but they didn’t provide any further detail.

Just over 10,000 refugees have arrived in the UK via VPRS, based on figures up to December 2017. The target was set in September 2015, with an end-date of 2020—so just over half the target has been met in roughly half the allotted time period. We don’t know if the pace of resettlement is expected to be the same across the whole period to 2020.

This fact check is part of a roundup of BBC Question Time.

Map from US Department of State - Humanitarian Information Unit , Source www.reliefweb.int





10 Facts About Refugees in Romania

July 18, 2017 – By *Shannon Golden*

On the border of the Black Sea in southeastern Europe rests Romania, a country nestled between Ukraine and Bulgaria. With a population of roughly 21.6 million and one of the fastest-growing economies in the European Union, the nation has agreed to welcome refugees. The country has been willing to help refugees but is often left without the necessary resources to do so. Here are 10 facts about refugees in Romania:

1. In November 2015, Romania agreed to welcome 6,205 refugees over the course of two years. Over 550 had entered the country by December 2016.
2. In Romania, the government covers the expenses of individuals granted refugee status for six months to one year. After this period of time, those individuals are expected to be employed.
3. Despite the six to 12 month grace period, refugees are required obtain an understanding of the Romanian language as well as some formal recognition of previous experience, academic degrees or other qualifications. Rarely are such documents easily available to refugees.
4. Civil society organizations, rather than Romanian authorities, are often left with the task of offering refugees much-needed employment assistance.
5. The Romanian Ministry of Labor does not assist refugees with their job searches; it only registers refugees in an unemployment database.
6. Learning Romanian has been described by refugees as being a key factor to succeeding in the country. Unfortunately, Romania's language courses have little structure and are often of low quality.
7. Roughly 5,000 individuals have been granted Romanian refugee protection since 1991, yet only 2,584 individuals hold residency permits. Such numbers suggest that nearly half of Romania's refugee population no longer reside in the country.
8. Relocated persons in Romania can benefit from the Jesuit Refugee Service, which runs a project called "A New House." The project aids refugees in finding affordable housing.
9. Many refugees in Romania who arrived in 2016 were relocated by the European Union from Greece and Italy.
10. Romania lacks resources for refugees, so the country is not receiving the waves of refugees that are entering other European countries. Therefore, Romania has relatively more time to plan exactly how to address the issue of refugee protection.

These facts about refugees in Romania may appear to be disheartening, but if the Romanian government can tackle the issue of resource allocation with thorough planning, the country may soon become a stable safe haven for refugees fleeing war-torn countries.

Source: <https://borgenproject.org/refugees-in-romania/>