

REFUGEE LAW AND COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE  
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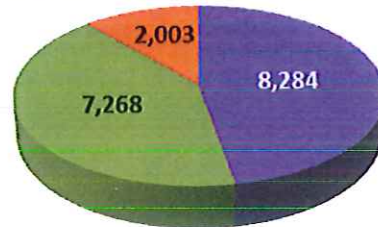
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## 2015–16 Humanitarian Programme Outcomes

The 2015–16 Humanitarian Programme was fully delivered, with 17,555 visas granted, comprising:

- 15,552\* Offshore component visas
  - o 8,284\* Refugee category visas
  - o 7,268\* Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) visas
- 2,003 Onshore component visas



■ Refugee ■ SHP ■ Onshore

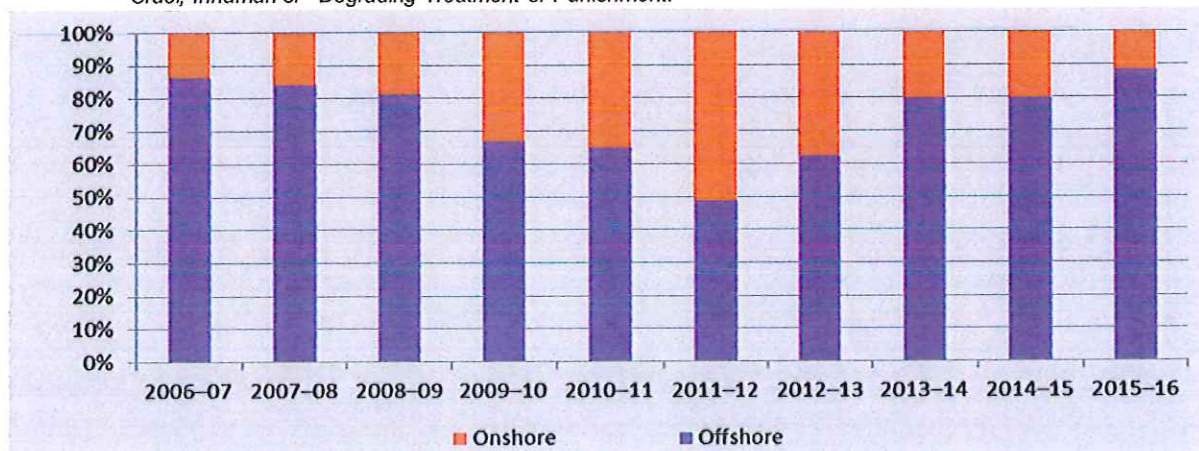
### Humanitarian Programme grants by component 2006–07 to 2015–16

Offshore resettlement component:

- offers resettlement in Australia for people overseas who are in the greatest need of resettlement.
- comprises visas granted under the:
  - Refugee category; and
  - Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) category.

Onshore protection/asylum component:

- offers protection for people in Australia who are found to be refugees according to the *Refugees Convention*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.



### Additional 12,000 humanitarian places for Syrians and Iraqis

In September 2015, the Australian Government announced an additional 12,000 Humanitarian Programme places for people displaced by conflicts in Syria and Iraq. These 12,000 places are in addition to places available to Syrians and Iraqis under Australia's existing Humanitarian Programme.

During the 2015–16 programme year, Australia granted 8,640 visas to people displaced by conflicts in Syria and Iraq. This included 3,790 visas towards the additional 12,000 humanitarian places, and 4,850 visas granted under the annual offshore resettlement component of the Humanitarian Programme.

Priority for the 12,000 additional humanitarian places is being given to people displaced by conflict in Syria and Iraq who are:

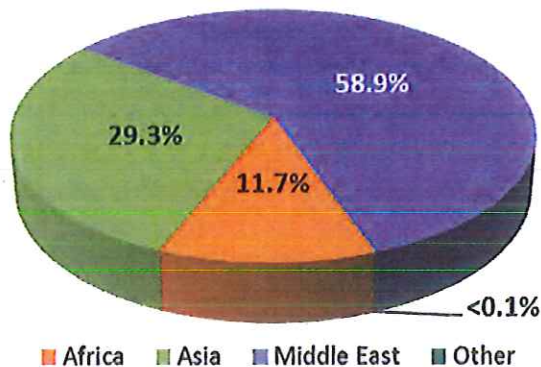
- assessed as being most vulnerable: persecuted minorities, women, children and families with the least prospect of ever returning safely to their homes;
- located in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

This includes people from a range of religious, ethnic and other backgrounds.

\*This includes visas granted towards the annual offshore resettlement component of the Humanitarian Programme, and the additional 12,000 places for people displaced by conflict in Syria and Iraq.



### Regional source of offshore grants



### Australia's Humanitarian Programme is characterised by its flexibility.

Each year, the size and focus of the Programme responds to evolving humanitarian situations and changes to the global need for resettlement.

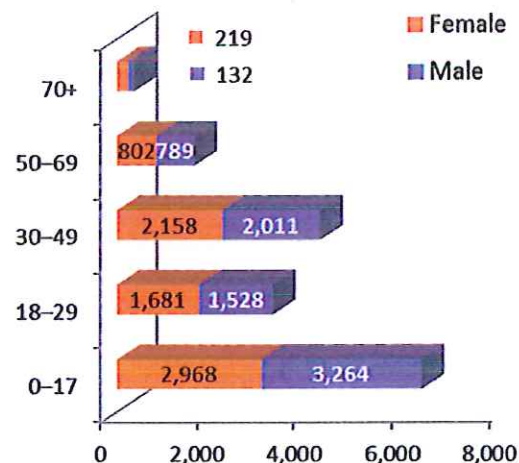
In line with global resettlement needs, in 2015–16 Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Programme focused on three priority regions of the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

The *regional source* pie chart shows Offshore Humanitarian Programme visa grants by region based on their country of birth.

### Offshore grants Top 10 Countries of Birth

Country of Birth	Refugee	SHP	Total
Iraq	2,069	2,289	4,358
Syria	1,710	2,551	4,261
Myanmar	1,031	920	1,951
Afghanistan	1,418	296	1,714
Congo (DRC)	580	77	657
Bhutan	137	378	515
Somalia	396	41	437
Iran	279	58	337
Ethiopia	229	108	337
Eritrea	155	136	291
Other	280	414	694
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,284</b>	<b>7,268</b>	<b>15,552</b>

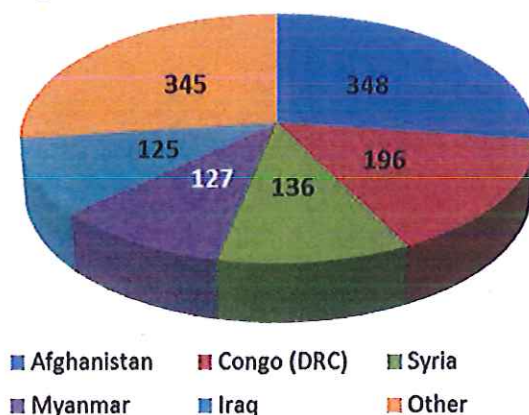
### Offshore grants By Age and Gender



### Woman at Risk visa grants by top 5 countries of birth

In 2015–16, 1,200 visas were allocated to the Woman at Risk subclass. At 30 June 2016, a total of 1,277 Woman at Risk visas were granted. This included visas granted under the annual offshore resettlement component Humanitarian Programme, and those granted towards the additional 12,000 places for Syrians and Iraqis.

This visa subclass recognises the priority given by UNHCR to the protection of refugee women who are in particularly vulnerable situations.



#### Notes:

1. As information has been drawn from dynamic system environments the information provided may differ from previous or future reporting.
2. Offshore Data was extracted from DIBP systems on 04 July 2016.
3. Onshore Data was extracted from DIBP systems on 01 July 2016.

## AUSTRALIAN OFFSHORE AND ONSHORE HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME

Year	Offshore visa SHP visa grants	Onshore protection visa grants	Offshore refugee visa grants (resettled)
2001– 2002	4,258	3,885	4,160
2002– 2003	7,280	866	4,376
2003– 2004	7,668	1,896	4,134
2004– 2005	6,585	4,601	5,511
2005– 2006	6,836	5,215	6,022
2006– 2007	5,275	2,243	6,003
2007– 2008	5,026	2,434	6,004
2008– 2009	4,586	3,266	6,499
2009– 2010	3,244	4,697	6,003
2010– 2011	2,981	4,818	5,998
2011– 2012	714	7,038	6,004
2012– 2013	503	7,504	12,012
2013– 2014	4515	2775	6501
2014– 2015	5,007	2,747	6,002
2015– 2016	5,000 (planned)	2,750 (planned)	6,000 (planned)

Source: Immigration Department Annual Reports (various years); DIBP, 'The Special Humanitarian Programme(SHP)', DIBP website; P Dutton, *Restoring integrity to refugee intake*, media release, 12 May 2015; DIBP, 'Onshore Humanitarian Programme 2015–16', DIBP website.





# The Roots of Europe's Refugee Crisis

Stefan Lehne, Marwan Muasher, Marc Pierini, Jan Techau, Pierre Vimont, Maha Yahya

Q&A

OCTOBER 1, 2015

**SUMMARY** The refugee crisis is impacting political stability in the Middle East and Europe. How should leaders respond to the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II?

As European leaders struggle to respond to the growing number of refugees crossing their countries' borders, divisions persist among EU member states over how to manage the continent's worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.

Meanwhile, the Arab region has come to host more than one-third of the world's refugees, with Lebanon and Jordan under significant strain. War has forcibly displaced more than 12 million Syrians in the past four years alone.

In this Q&A, Carnegie experts trace the evolution of the crisis. They analyze how it is impacting political stability in the Middle East and Europe, and what leaders should do about it.

- What's driving the refugee flows?
- How are the refugee flows changing the Middle East?
- How have countries in the Middle East and the broader international community responded to the crisis thus far?
- How are the refugees traveling to Europe? Is the flow going to abate any time soon?
- Was Europe prepared?
- How will this crisis impact political stability in Europe?
- What kind of policy responses are needed now?

## What's driving the refugee flows?

*Maha Yahya:* The Syrian crisis is a huge driver. Globally one in five refugees is Syrian. They augment millions of Libyans, Sudanese, Somalis, Iraqis, Afghans, Yemenis, and more fleeing conflicts in their own countries.

One of the most significant factors driving the recent surge of refugees is the sense of hopelessness that now prevails among Syrians. After four years of war, and with no political or diplomatic breakthrough in sight, their future in Syria looks bleak.

This reality is also sinking in among Syrians hosted in neighboring countries. There is a sense of despair, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon, where being a refugee means living in limbo: unable to work, surviving on aid, and having one's movements restricted. There is simply no prospect of establishing any kind of future for oneself or one's family. The shortfall in funding for humanitarian support is also life threatening for many.

The majority of refugees headed to Europe are fleeing directly from Syria, but some are also leaving Lebanon with indications that daily, hundreds are embarking on the treacherous trip. There is a rush in particular among Syrians in the professional middle class—or what is left of it. They are risking their lives and the lives of their children to reach Europe, which offers the possibility of security, safety, and eventually building a future. Young men are also leaving to avoid now-mandatory military conscription by the Syrian army and to escape a war of which they want no part.

Syria is the biggest but not the only driver. Other conflicts, including those in Somalia and Eritrea, have displaced millions as a result of identity-based persecution and repression. Practical considerations are driving this massive movement of people, including the relative ease of the route via Turkey and Greece to the Balkans. The price of transport has also dropped from an estimated \$5,000–\$6,000 to \$2,000–\$3,000 per person. And the collapse of the central state in Libya opened a new route for economic migrants from Africa.

On the regional front, the willingness of Gulf countries to provide financial assistance for humanitarian support and their reluctance to host refugees means that those fleeing war are limited in their choice of safe havens. In this context, Europe can offer stability and prospects for a future that no other place can.

## How are the refugee flows changing the Middle East?

*Maha Yahya:* Beyond the significant humanitarian aspects of this crisis, these massive population shifts are dramatically altering the political, economic, social, and cultural trajectories of individual countries and the region as a whole. Forced displacements and population transfers based on ethnic and sectarian identities are reconfiguring the political maps of Syria and Iraq and threatening to undo the social orders of both Lebanon and Jordan. They are also leading communities searching for ways to protect themselves to militarize.

Meanwhile, the crisis is generating a massive new underclass of impoverished citizens, jeopardizing the future of generations, and placing some at risk of radicalization. Refugees and internally displaced persons are living in a state of exception, pushed to the fringes of society, unable to reconstitute their lives or make a gainful living. There has been a dramatic rollback of development gains in areas such as education, healthcare, and food security, as close to 80 percent of Syrians have slid into poverty, 9.8 million are food insecure, and around 2 million children are left without education. In host countries, there has been a race to the bottom as the most impoverished refugees compete with equally disadvantaged citizens for scarce resources.

In this environment, refugees are pushed to make choices that can prejudice their futures, including removing children from school, acquiring astronomical debt, and becoming involved in illicit activities. If left unaddressed, this will trap the region in a cycle of vulnerability for decades to come.

## How have countries in the Middle East and the broader international community responded to the crisis thus far?

*Marwan Muasher:* Both Jordan and Lebanon, the two states under the most strain in Syria's neighborhood, have done remarkably well in response to the refugee crisis, considering its magnitude and their resources. They have not closed borders and have provided whatever relief they can to the refugees. Yet, this influx is clearly a significant problem for these countries.

Although some refugees work illegally because they have to in order to survive, wages are far below what could be earned through legal employment if that were permitted. There are valid arguments calling on the Jordanian government in particular to allow refugees to work in certain sectors that employ foreign workers anyway, as this would allow the refugees to be more self-sufficient, would reduce tensions between refugees and locals as well as radicalization trends, and would benefit the local economy.

The sheer scale of the crisis is also an issue. Lebanon, a small country with a native population of less than 5 million, has over 1 million Syrian refugees. Jordan, with a population of less than 7 million, is host to over 600,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to an estimated 800,000 Syrians that were living in the country before the crisis according to the government.

And these two countries were strapped economically even before the refugee crisis. Public debt and unemployment levels were both high. They do not have the kind of financial resources or capacity that European countries have.

Most of the aid efforts the international community has undertaken to date have focused on humanitarian relief. And food and shelter for refugees is certainly needed, particularly as winter approaches.

But countries like Jordan and Lebanon need more than just food and shelter for refugees. They also need assistance directed toward empowering the refugees in the long term. There has been little focus on education or on other steps that would ensure that these refugees have the necessary skills to make it in life and are not radicalized.

Both Europe and the United States have taken a backseat in response to the crisis in the region and have let Syria's neighbors deal with it. But it can no longer be ignored.

## **How are the refugees traveling to Europe? Is the flow going to abate any time soon?**

*Marc Pierini:* This year's surge of migrants to Europe is specifically composed of asylum seekers, and the emergence of effective and tech-savvy networks of traffickers is enabling their journeys.

These asylum seekers are absolutely determined to make it to Europe, so to speak, irrespective of the dangers and difficulties involved. They are also willing to pay intermediaries astounding amounts of money to make the journey. Based on the number of asylum seekers who have been registered in the EU from January to June 2015 and a conservative estimate of €2,500 (\$2,800) for the journey from Syria/Turkey to the EU, this makes for a total amount of over €1.0 billion for the half-year period. And traffickers are becoming increasingly more sophisticated.

Meanwhile, Turkey, a transit country on refugees' journeys to Europe, has not thoroughly attempted to control the movements of refugees along the Aegean coast. Authorities also tend to turn a blind eye to trafficking and to the growing business of forging Syrian passports.

Turkey has a new responsibility in this difficult crisis. Although the government complains about not having received enough assistance from the EU over the past several years, it declared in 2011 that it would not accept assistance according to EU methods; it would only take assistance in the form of blank checks made out to its emergency agency. But Turkey cannot just sit on the sidelines and watch the massive social and political destabilization of the Europe it has sought to join.

The current refugee crisis in Europe is not about to abate. The main reason is that there are millions of refugees unable to return home: from Syria alone, there are 4 million people in neighboring countries and nearly 8 million internally displaced.

Another important reason is that the Russian military buildup in Syria will inevitably generate the fear that there will be more fighting and more casualties, causing even more people to seek refuge outside of Syria and those who have left to stay away.

In addition, the fact that Germany expects to receive 800,000 refugees gives hope to asylum seekers that



there is a reasonable chance to make it to Europe, which they see as a safer haven than any of the other options (such as the Gulf) in terms of security, rights, and opportunities.

Faced with their current situation, asylum seekers generally think that there is nothing to lose in undertaking the dangerous journey.

## Was Europe prepared?

*Jan Techau:* At the analytical level, Europe was not unprepared for the large stream of refugees that developed into a trek of biblical proportions over the summer. Experts from various policy fields (migration, security, development, the environment) had frequently warned about the risk of unchanneled mass migration toward Europe.

But politically, the EU was completely unprepared. Knowledge did not translate into action.

More importantly, the crisis hit Europe so hard because at its root is a simultaneous long-term public policy failure in about a dozen policy fields. From immigration to integration policies, from border control to the fight against organized crime, from humanitarian aid to internal solidarity and burden sharing, from trade policy to development cooperation, from military interventions to the European Neighborhood Policy—Europe has failed so consistently and so comprehensively that fixing the multilayered issue is one of the most complicated and convoluted tasks Europeans have ever had to face collectively. Europeans have been oblivious to the scope of their failure, so they are equally overwhelmed by the size of the crisis this failure has created.

Politicians have especially avoided the integration part of the refugee issue. Partly, this has to do with ideology. The political Left has steadily argued against immigration policies because it fears that establishing fixed rules will limit migration. The Right has done the same thing but for the exact opposite reason: it fears that systematizing migration will only open the floodgates. This constitutes an informal grand coalition against pragmatic problem solving.

Then there are the emotional identity issues. Few other issues have triggered as many as this one. And few other issues have triggered as determined a reaction to protect the national interest as the massive influx of strangers into the homeland.

Countries with well-developed immigration policies, such as the UK, were better prepared. Others, where no tradition of integrating large numbers of foreigners into the mainstream exists—such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania—balked at the prospect of taking a share of the refugees in.

As a consequence, organizing a roughly balanced burden sharing among member states became hugely difficult. An East-West division emerged. Despite a compromise on the issue forced through the European Council, tensions remain strong, and decisionmaking will continue to be difficult.

Identity politics and anti-EU sentiments had already been rife before the refugees arrived at Europe's doorstep. Trying to make the case for the integration of hundreds of thousands of refugees into host societies under today's circumstances is especially hard.

## How will this crisis impact political stability in Europe?

*Stefan Lehne:* Crises bring out the best and worst in people. The sudden mass influx of refugees has triggered an amazing readiness to help as well as outpourings of xenophobia and fire bombings of refugee accommodations. Which type of response prevails will depend to a large extent on political leadership.

Most experts agree that Europe needs immigration to compensate for its deteriorating demographics, to regain growth, and to maintain its welfare systems. The current wave of refugee arrivals is therefore in the longer term a good thing for Europe.

The problem is that at this point the process is utterly chaotic. Many people experience masses of foreign people marching through Europe as a threat to their established way of life.



Populist movements exploiting these fears are therefore gaining ground in many countries. For these groups, anti-immigration feelings go hand in hand with rejection of the EU, which is blamed for this loss of control.

Mainstream parties waver between making the case for welcoming the refugees (in particular in Germany, where for historical reasons the populist Right is taboo) and restrictive policies catering to fears in the population. As politics remain largely national in Europe, these parties too are tempted to reestablish control through national means—hence, the acute threat to the Schengen system.

If current trends continue, tensions in the member states and acrimony among EU governments are bound to increase. That is why Europe needs to turn the chaotic influx of people into a well-managed process. This involves reestablishing control over the EU's external borders, harmonizing asylum policies, and agreeing on a fair way to share the burden.

While this will be very difficult, it is still the easy part. The real task is to effectively integrate the new arrivals and avoid the emergence of ghettos and parallel societies. Only thus can Europeans preserve the mutual trust on which their way of life rests. There is no greater challenge confronting Europe today.

## What kind of policy responses are needed now?

*Pierre Vimont:* Appropriate responses can only be defined with an accurate assessment of the challenges raised by the current crisis. The issue is therefore how to address the despair-filled future faced by migrants and to propose responses to the short-term urgencies while also tackling the more structural problems.

In the short term, the first priority for Europeans is to get their house in order and abide by their own internal rules and international conventions with a greater sense of solidarity and responsibility. Then Europeans should increase their engagement with the frontline nations—not only Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, but also Ethiopia, Kenya, and many others—that have been sheltering up to now much of the migrant population.

If political refugees are to be convinced to remain in transit countries, they should be provided a decent existence with some realistic prospects for food and healthcare, temporary employment, and education for their children. Additional action should also be pursued in Syria through the establishment of humanitarian zones accepted by all sides.

These efforts must be completed by addressing the root causes of the crisis with concrete deliverables. On Iraq, Libya, and Syria, diplomatic efforts among international partners should be accelerated, building on the work already done by the UN and bringing in the main regional players that have so far resisted any real concession. Why not host an international conference dedicated to the security of the entire Middle East? Such a conference could deal with the current and various regional crises to convince Saudi Arabia and Iran to join in a balanced deal, taking into account their diverging national interests. Other crises in Yemen, northern Nigeria, and the Sahel region should benefit from the same attention because they all carry a risk of increasing the flow of migrants.

Acting on root causes also means making some serious effort to offer economic perspectives for migrants from Africa or South Asia. Improved circulation of remittances, engagement of diasporas in productive investments in countries of origin, support for young entrepreneurs, and, more generally, dedicated programs for creating jobs where refugee communities are currently located or where migrants would be reintegrated when they return to their home countries—all of these actions should be encouraged as proof of the willingness of the international community to tackle migration challenges.

## Related Topics

- Europe
- Germany
- Middle East and North Africa
- Turkey



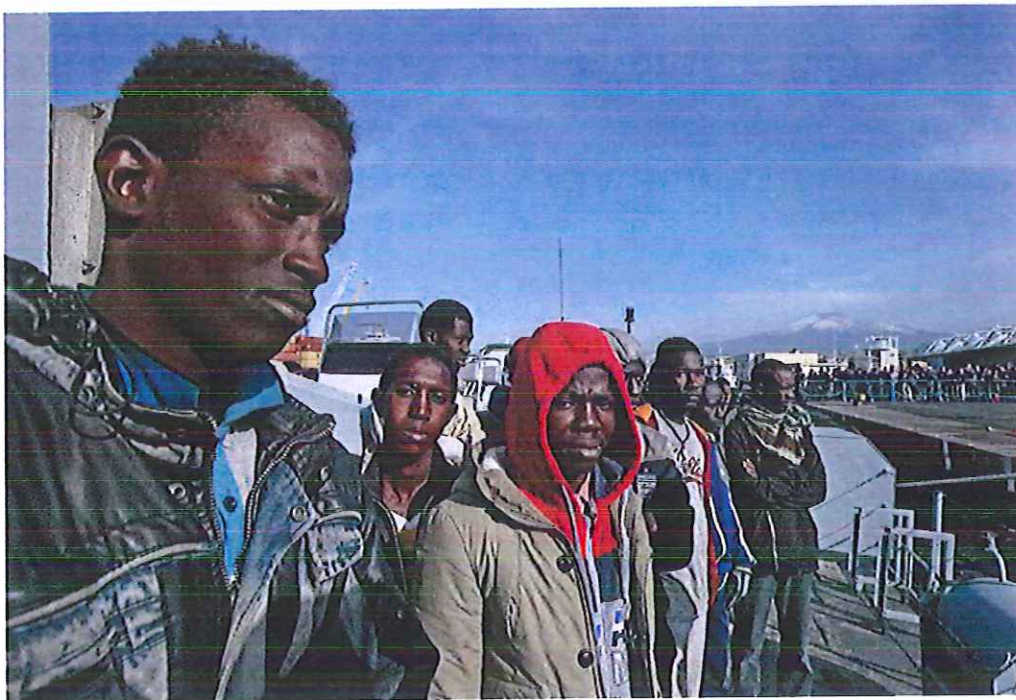
# THE CONVERSATION

## To deal with the refugee crisis you need to understand the cause

April 23, 2015 3.10pm EDT

**Alexander Betts**

Leopold Muller Associate Professor in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, University of Oxford



There are an estimated 9m displaced people in Syria alone. EPA/Alessandro Di Meo

The ongoing crisis in the Mediterranean, which has seen more than 30 times as many people die as in the same period last year, has evoked unprecedented media attention. What should be about a humanitarian tragedy has become hijacked by opportunist politicians, who in many cases have fundamentally and wilfully misrepresented the underlying causes of the problem. If solutions are based on that misrepresentation, they will fail and have harmful consequences.

From early in the week, Italy's prime minister, Matteo Renzi, focused on proclaiming a "war on trafficking", describing it as "the slavery of our time".

UK foreign secretary, Phillip Hammond and others followed suit. Yet there are at least two problems with this narrative. First, it fails to distinguish between "trafficking" and "smuggling", the former being irrelevant in this context.



Second, and more importantly, it fails to recognise that smuggling does not cause migration, it responds to an underlying demand. Criminalising the smugglers serves as a convenient scapegoat. But it cannot solve the problem. It will simply displace the problem, increase prices, introduce ever less scrupulous market entrants, and make journey ever more perilous.

## Crisis of displacement

The real causes of the tragedy are two-fold. First, we need to situate the tragedy in a broader context. There is a global displacement crisis. Around the world, more people are displaced than at any time since the World War II. Globally, there are more than 50m displaced and 16m refugees. To take the case of Syria, there are 9m displaced Syrians; 3m of whom are refugees. Most are in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. But countries like Jordan and Lebanon – whose capacities are stretched to breaking point – are now closing their borders and in need of international burden-sharing. These people have to go somewhere and increasingly they are travelling on to Europe in search of protection.

Second, the cause of the deaths can be directly linked to Europe's decision to end the Italian search and rescue operation Mare Nostrum in November 2014 and replace it with the inadequately funded EU-run Operation Triton. Mare Nostrum saved more than 100,000 lives last year. Since the ending of Mare Nostrum many fewer have been rescued and many more have died. To address the crisis, it is these two causes that need to be looked at first.

We know from existing data that the people crossing the Mediterranean are increasingly from refugee-producing countries such as Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia. While some – coming from West Africa – may well be more likely to be leaving poverty or seeking opportunity, a huge proportion are therefore fleeing conflict and persecution and are in need of international protection.

We have international legal obligations to protect such people. Yet the EU has largely failed to recognise this. On Monday, the EU held an emergency meeting in Luxembourg at which it produced a ten-point plan. This was vague in detail but the emphasis was on dismantling the smugglers and on containing migration from within North Africa. References to humanitarian roles such as expanding Triton and refugee resettlement remained under-specified. The logic, in other words, was primarily about containment and counter-smuggling operations.



EU summit: very little on the table. EPA/Yves Herman

This emphasis has been repeated in the leaked draft statement of the EU Summit. The statement highlights deportation and immigration control; it is a manifesto for containment. It proposes to deport 150,000 people and offer relocation across Europe of up to a quota of 5,000 while emphasising the aspiration to bolster Libya's capacity to control migration to the EU. It again shows a misunderstanding of the underlying causes of the problem, and it likely to be inconsistent with international refugee and human rights law.

There are no simple solutions to this issue. But the key to finding solutions is by putting the issue in its broader context. The UN rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Francois Crepeau, has been among the most articulate in highlighting this.

A joint statement by Antonio Guterres, Peter Sutherland, Bill Swing and Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has emphasised the need for solutions that go beyond the "minimalist" EU response. These include a well-resourced search-and-rescue operation; channels for safe and regular migration; making a firm commitment to receive significantly higher numbers of refugees through EU-wide resettlement; bolstering arrangements for more equitable burden-sharing within Europe and combating racism and xenophobia. These are sensible solutions and advance the debate.

However, to ultimately, address the underlying causes of the issue a global and comprehensive approach is needed. It is a symptom of a global displacement crisis needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way.

## Learning from history

There are instructive lessons from history. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, literally hundreds of thousands of Indochinese "boat people" crossed territorial waters from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia towards South-East Asian host states such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, as well as Hong Kong. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the host states, facing an influx, pushed many of the boats back into the water and people drowned. Like today, there was a public response to images of people drowning on television and in newspapers. But addressing the issue took political leadership and large-scale international cooperation.

In 1989 under UNHCR leadership, a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was agreed for Indochinese refugees. It was based on an international agreement for sharing responsibility. The receiving countries in South-East Asia agreed to keep their borders open, engage in search and rescue operations and provide reception to the boat people.

But they did so based on two sets of commitments from other states. First, a coalition of governments – the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the European states – committed to resettle all those who were judged to be refugees. Second, alternative and humane solutions including return and alternative, legal immigration channels were found for those who were not refugees in need of international protection. The CPA led to millions being resettled and the most immediate humanitarian challenge was addressed.

The CPA was not perfect and it is not a perfect analogy to the contemporary Mediterranean, but it highlights the need to a broader framework based on international cooperation and responsibility-sharing. The elements of a solution to the contemporary crisis have to be at a

number of different levels.

These include improvements in search and rescue to return to at least the capacity of Mare Nostrum; more equitable burden-sharing and relocation of refugees within the European Union; support to gradually build to protection and human rights capacities of transit countries. In addition to these creative solutions and additional support are needed for refugee-hosting countries in regions of origin – and we need to promote the refugees' capacities to contribute to their host state. Finally, we need a European resettlement scheme that reflects a commitment to proportionately share responsibility for the global refugee population.

Above all, though, solutions have to come from a reaffirmation of the need to uphold asylum and refugee protection, and to see these as a shared global responsibility.

If there is to be a silver lining to the current crisis, it stems from the opportunity to political leadership to reframe how refugees are seen by the public and to come up with creative solutions for refugees and vulnerable migrants on a global scale.

But that will take political courage and leadership.



Refugees

UNHCR

Boat people

Migrants

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## Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals in 2016 Near 155,000; Deaths Reach 467

Posted: 03/18/16

Region-Country: Europe and Central Asia / Greece

Themes: Humanitarian Emergencies, Missing Migrants

**Greece** - With winter ending and warmer conditions prevailing, the Central Mediterranean migrant route between North Africa and Sicily has become busier, monitors from IOM in Rome report, indicating a surge of migrant and refugee arrivals under way in the months to come.

Including sea routes to Spain and the Greek Islands, IOM estimates that some 156,000 migrants and refugees have landed in Europe from Africa and the Middle East in the first ten and a half weeks of 2016. That compares to fewer than 20,000 migrant and refugees during the same period last year.

Since the start of 2014, IOM calculates almost 1.4 million migrants and refugees have crossed the Mediterranean and entered Europe via one of five EU coastal borders: Italy, Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Malta. Through March 16 of this year, IOM counts over 997,000 seaborne arrivals just to Greece, still short of the one million mark. However, combined land and sea arrivals to Greece have moved slightly ahead of the one million mark, as reported earlier this week by the Associated Press.


[http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/pictures/gr16](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/pictures/gr16)

Italian Navy rescuing stranded migrants earlier this week. © Italian Navy

### Arrivals by sea and deaths in the Mediterranean 2015/2016

1 Jan – 17 Mar 2016			1 Jan – 31 March 2015	
Country	Arrivals	Deaths	Arrivals	Deaths
Greece	143,886	362 (Eastern Med route)	10,535	505 (includes all Med routes)
Italy	11,000	105 (Central and West Med route)	10,165	

Estimated total	154,886	467	20,700	505
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About 2,400 migrants were rescued at sea in the Channel of Sicily between 15 and 17 March. Ships of the Italian Navy, the British Navy and the German Navy, and by the Norwegian Siem Pilot and the "Aquarius ship" from the Sos Méditerranée association have carried out the rescue operations. Rescued migrants were mainly Western African and Eritrean.

"Arrivals to Italy have never really slowed down; this year we are actually noticing a slight increase in the number of migrants arriving from Libya. As of today, almost 12,000 migrants have landed in Italy, about 2,000 more compared to the number of migrants that arrived in the same period last year," said Federico Soda, Director of the IOM Coordination Office for the Mediterranean.

"For the moment flows are only composed of African nationals while the number of Syrians has dropped: in the first 2 months of the year, only 6 Syrians arrived by sea to Italy."

"The nature and composition of the migration flows to Italy are mixed," said Soda. "They include smuggled and trafficked persons, unaccompanied and separated children, environmental migrants, pregnant women and refugees."

"Italy's efforts and those of the international vessels in rescuing over 2,400 migrants at sea in only 48 hours are outstanding: IOM praises the work carried out by the many different ships that are constantly patrolling the Channel of Sicily."

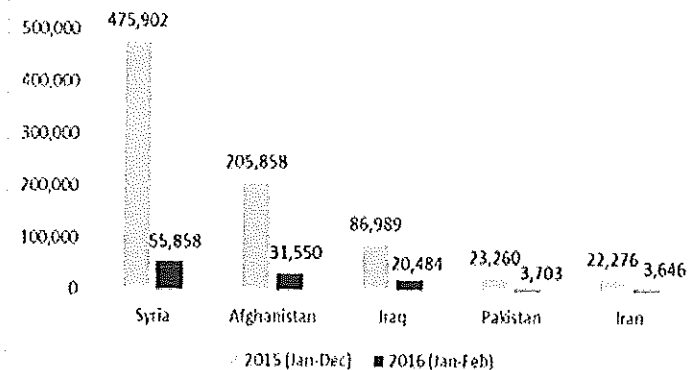
According to IOM estimates, almost 470 migrants lost their lives at sea this year: 362 in the Aegean Sea, 100 in the Channel of Sicily, and five more in the waters between Spain and Africa.

Last year, through the end of March, more than 500 migrants

drowned, mainly in the Channel of Sicily between Italy and Libya.

Country	Jan 2016	Follow up 2016	Jan 2016	Share
			<b>2016</b>	
Greece	34,442	853,650	143,886	
Italy	170,100	153,842	11,000	

Arrivals by sea to Greece - Main Nationalities  
2015/2016



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([http://missingmigrants.iom.int/sites/default/files/Mediterranean\\_Update\\_18\\_March\\_2016.pdf](http://missingmigrants.iom.int/sites/default/files/Mediterranean_Update_18_March_2016.pdf))

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## Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts

4 March 2016 | Europe



More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, sparking a crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx, and creating division in the EU over how best to deal with resettling people.

The vast majority arrived by sea but some migrants have made their way over land, principally via Turkey and Albania.

Winter has not stemmed the flow of people - with 135,711 people reaching Europe by sea since the start of 2016, according to the UNHCR.

### 1. Which countries are migrants from?

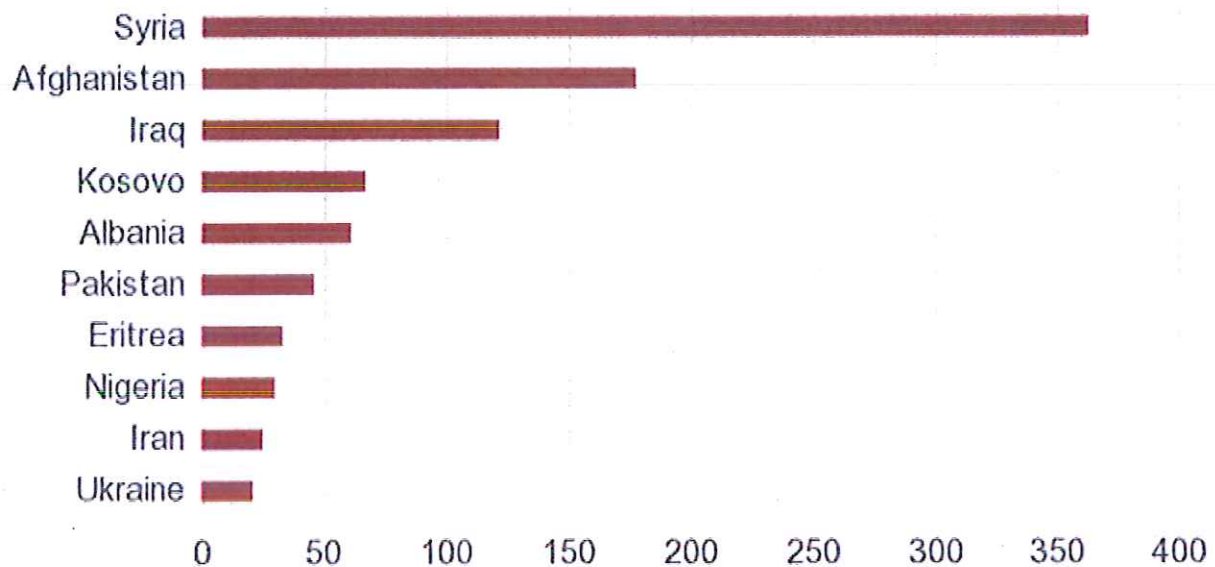
The conflict in Syria continues to be by far the biggest driver of migration. But the ongoing violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, abuses in Eritrea, as well as poverty in Kosovo, are also

16

leading people to look for new lives elsewhere.

## Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU

First-time applications in 2015, in thousands



Source: Eurostat

## 2. Where are migrants going?

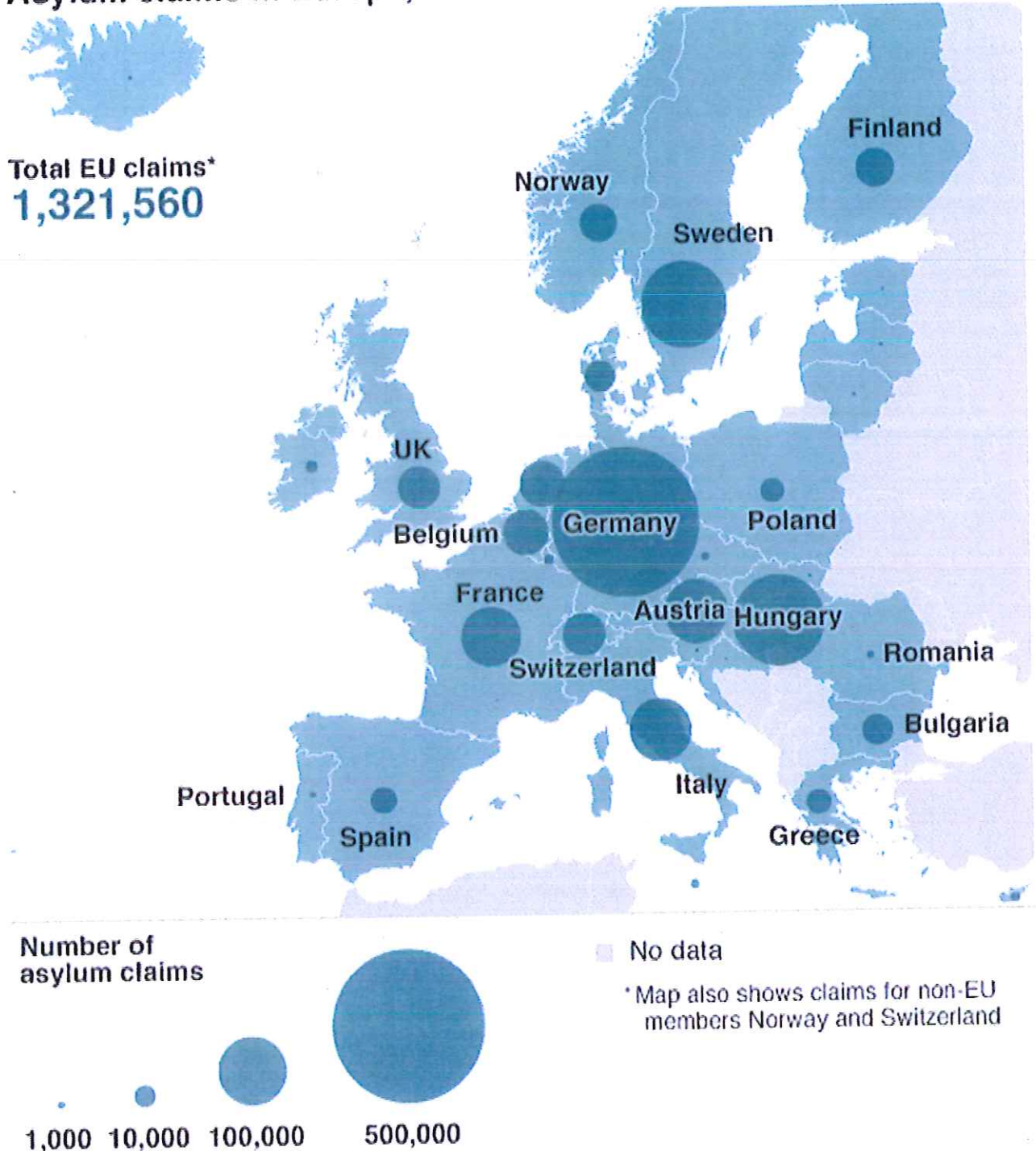
Although not all of those arriving in Europe choose to claim asylum, many do. Germany received the highest number of new asylum applications in 2015, with **more than 476,000**.

But far more people have arrived in the country - German officials said **more than a million** had been counted in Germany's "EASY" system for counting and distributing people before they make asylum claims.

Hungary moved into second place for asylum applications, as more migrants made the journey overland through Greece and the Western Balkans. It had **177,130** applications by the end of December.



## Asylum claims in Europe, 2015



Source: Eurostat

BBC

### 3. How do migrants get to Europe?

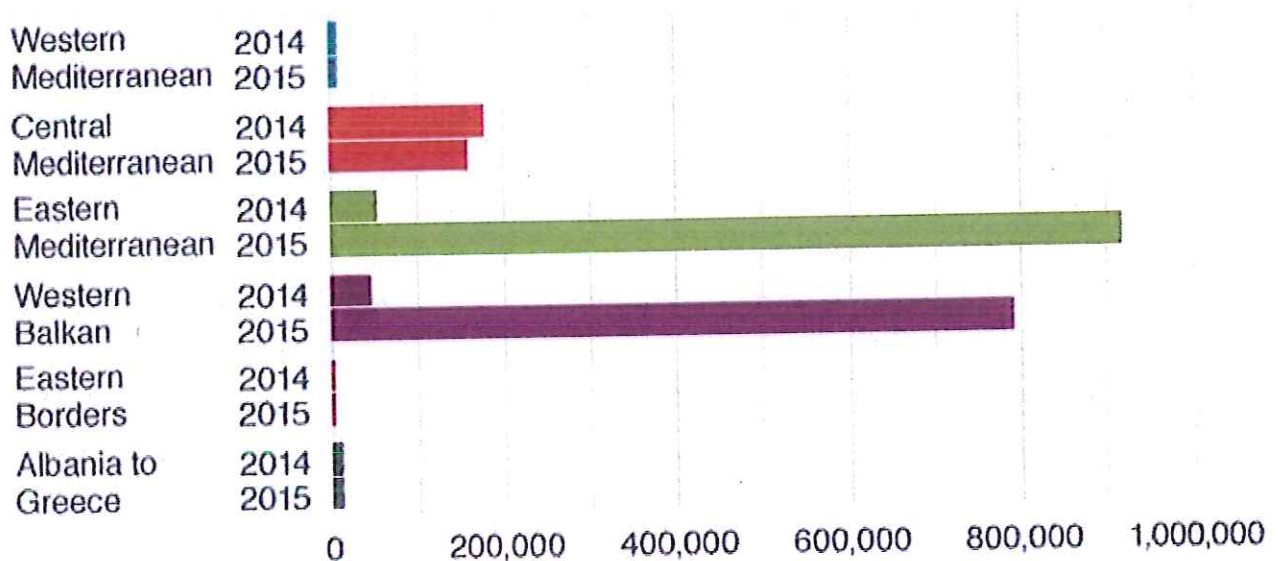
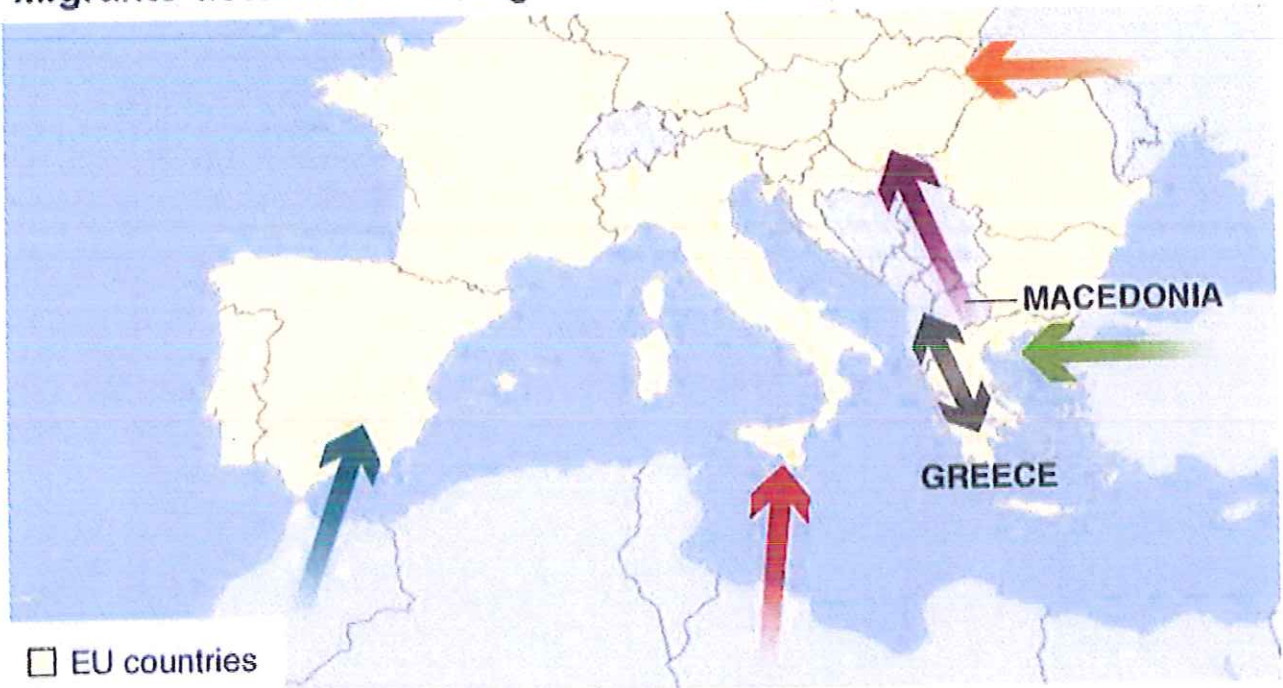
The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than **1,011,700** migrants arrived by sea in 2015, and almost **34,900** by land.

This compares with 280,000 arrivals by land and sea for the whole of 2014. The figures do not include those who got in undetected.

The EU's external border force, Frontex, monitors the different routes migrants use and numbers arriving at Europe's borders and put the figure crossing into Europe in 2015 at more than 1,800,000.

Most of those heading for Greece take the relatively short voyage from Turkey to the islands of Kos, Chios, Lesbos and Samos - often in flimsy rubber dinghies or small wooden boats.

### Migrants detected entering the EU illegally, 2014-2015



Source: Frontex

BBC

#### 4. How dangerous is the journey?

According to the IOM, more than 3,770 migrants were reported to have died trying to cross the



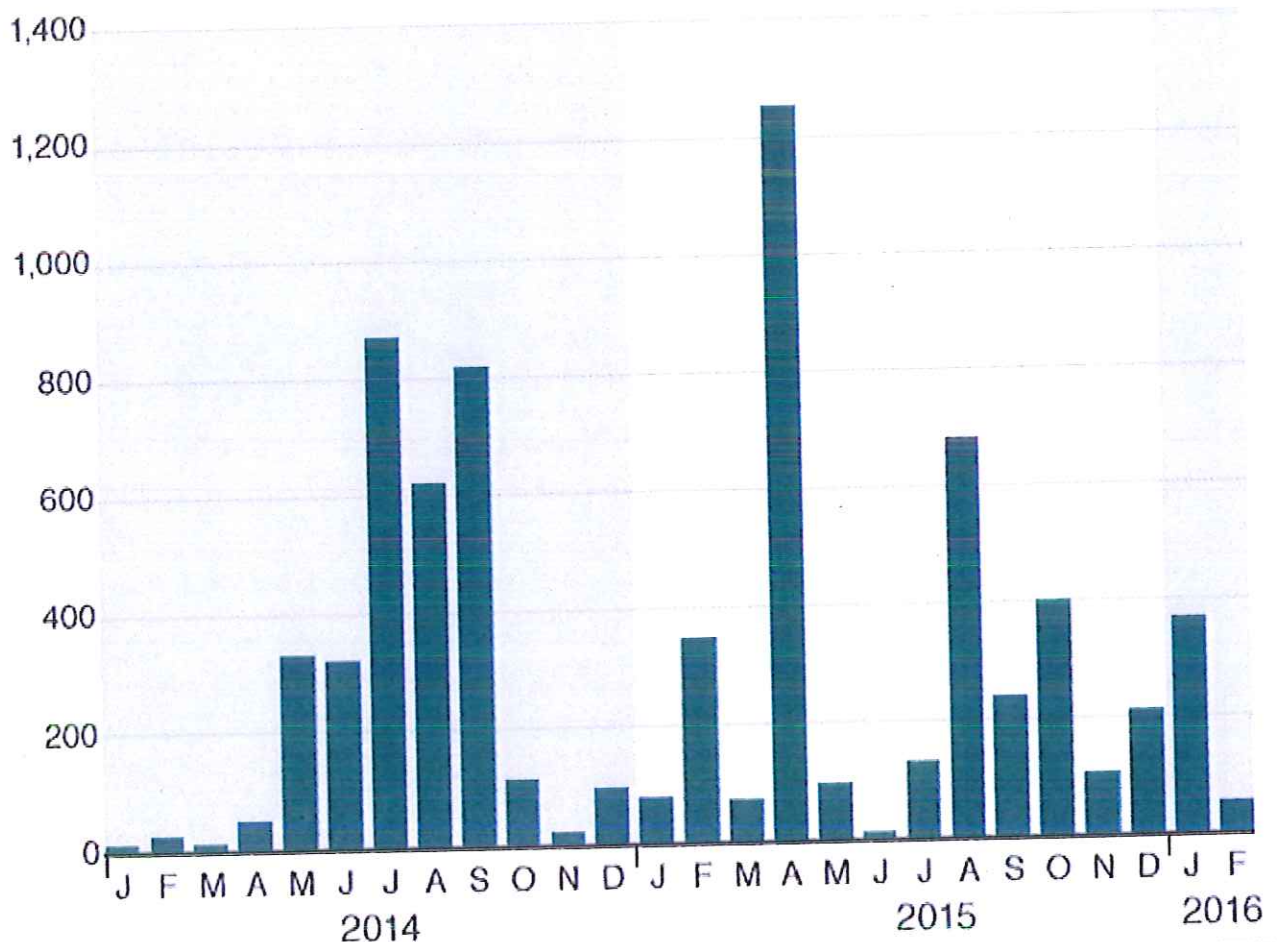
Mediterranean in 2015.

Most died on the crossing from north Africa to Italy, and more than 800 died in the Aegean crossing from Turkey to Greece.

The summer months are usually when most fatalities occur as it is the busiest time for migrants attempting to reach Europe.

But in 2015, the deadliest month for migrants was April, which saw a boat carrying about 800 people capsize in the sea off Libya. Overcrowding is thought to have been one of the reasons for the disaster.

## Migrant deaths in the Mediterranean by month



Source: IOM

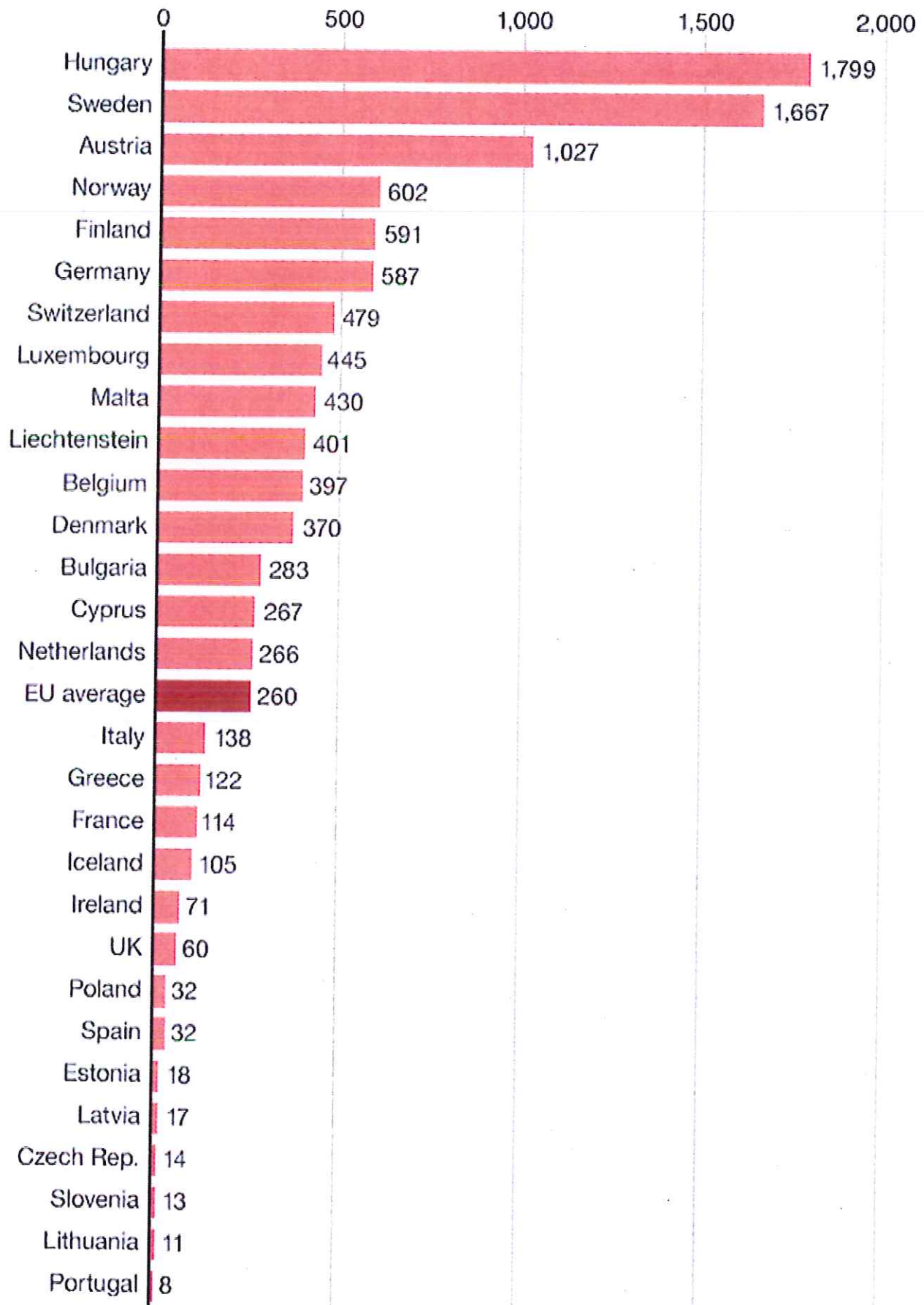
BBC

### 5. Which European countries are most affected?

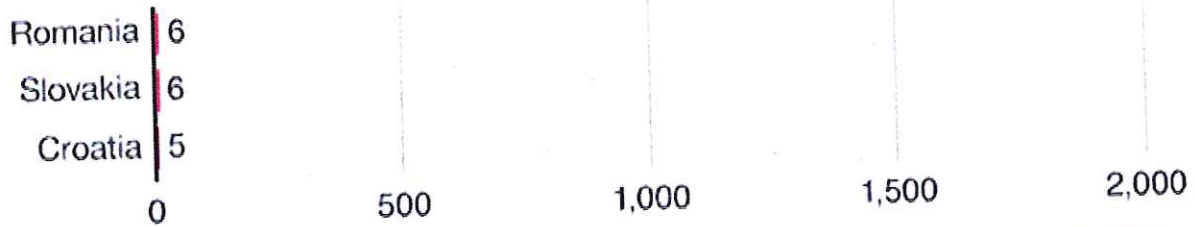
Although Germany has had the most asylum applications in 2015, Hungary had the highest proportion to its population, despite having closed its border with Croatia in an attempt to stop the flow in October. Nearly 1,800 refugees per 100,000 of Hungary's local population claimed asylum in 2015. Sweden followed close behind with 1,667 per 100,000.

The figure for Germany was 587 and for the UK it was 60 applications for every 100,000 residents. The EU average was 260.

## Asylum applications per 100,000 local population, 2015







Source: Eurostat

BBC

## 6. How has Europe responded?

Tensions in the EU have been rising because of the disproportionate burden faced by some countries, particularly the countries where the majority of migrants have been arriving: Greece, Italy and Hungary.

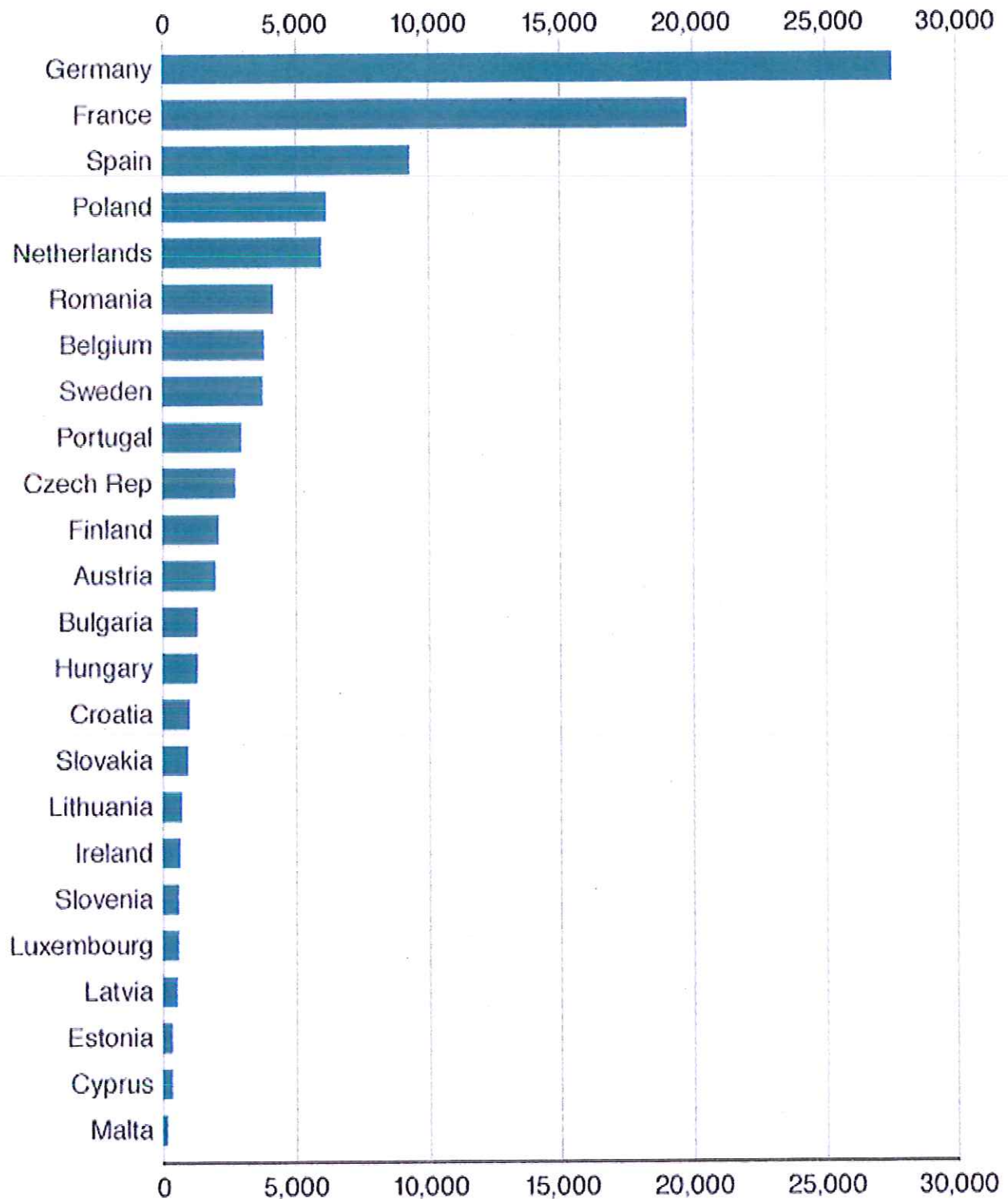
In September, EU ministers voted by a majority to relocate 160,000 refugees EU-wide, but for now the plan will only apply to those who are in Italy and Greece.

Another 54,000 were to be moved from Hungary, but **the Hungarian government rejected this plan and will instead receive more migrants** from Italy and Greece as part of the relocation scheme.

The UK has opted out of any plans for a quota system but, according to Home Office figures, 1,000 Syrian refugees were resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme in 2015. Prime Minister David Cameron has said the UK will accept up to 20,000 refugees from Syria over the next five years.

## EU member state migrant quotas

Number of people countries have agreed to relocate from Greece and Italy



Note: the UK and Denmark are not taking part in the relocation scheme

Source: European Commission

BBC

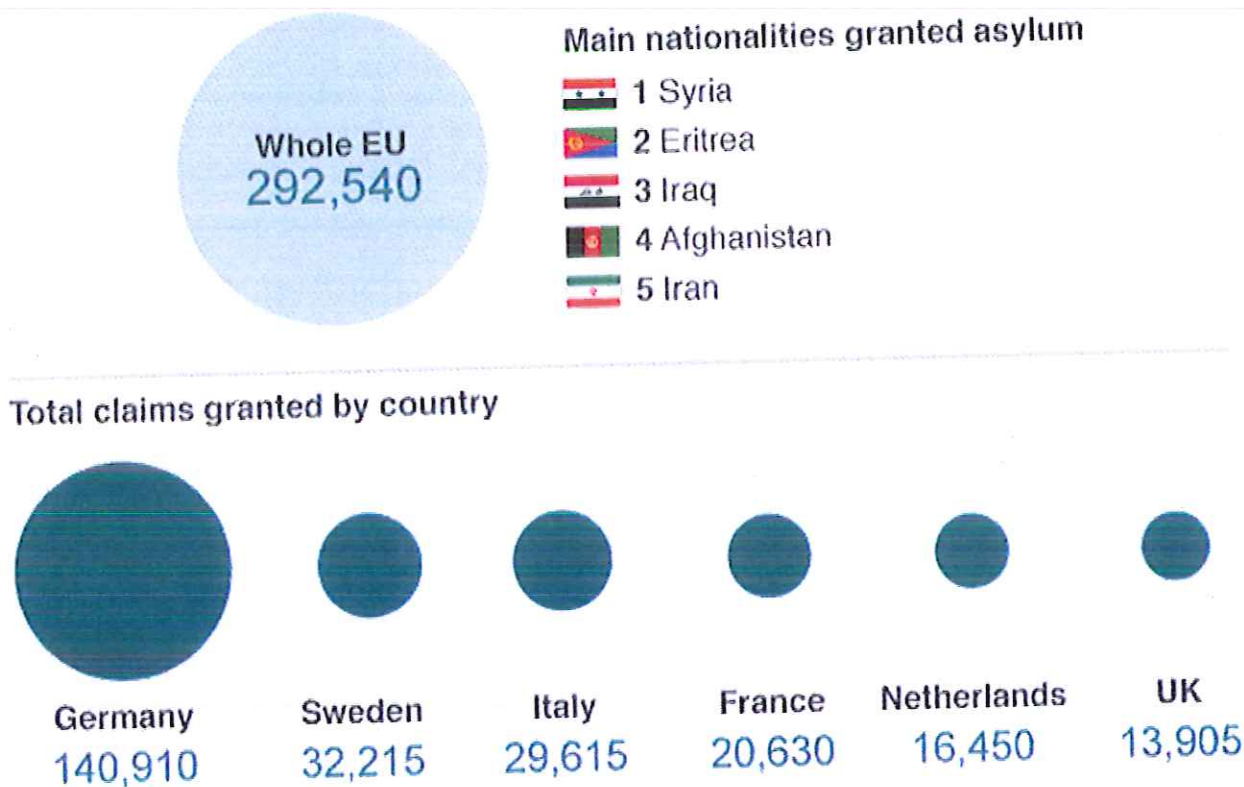
7. How many asylum claims are approved?



Although huge numbers have been applying for asylum, the number of people being given asylum is far lower.

In 2015, EU countries offered asylum to 292,540 refugees. In the same year, more than a million migrants applied for asylum - although applying for asylum can be a lengthy procedure so many of those given refugee status may have applied in previous years.

## Asylum applications approved 2015



Source: Eurostat

BBC

**A note on terminology:** The BBC uses the term migrant to refer to all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. This group includes people fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, who governments are likely to rule are economic migrants.

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# Unaccompanied Alien Children: Potential Factors Contributing to Recent Immigration

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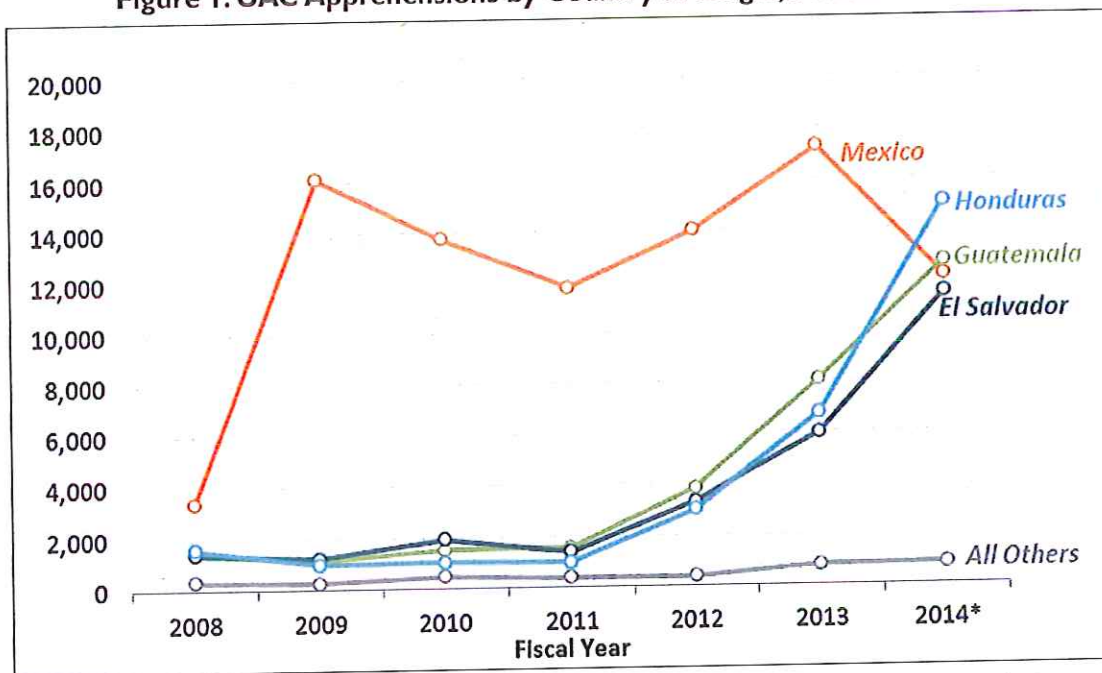
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## Background<sup>3</sup>

Unaccompanied alien children (UAC) are defined in statute as aliens<sup>4</sup> under age 18, who lack lawful immigration status in the United States, and who are without a parent or legal guardian in the United States or lack a parent or legal guardian in the United States who is available to provide care and physical custody.<sup>5</sup> They typically arrive at U.S. ports of entry or are apprehended along the southwestern border with Mexico. Less frequently they are apprehended in the interior and determined to be a juvenile<sup>6</sup> and unaccompanied.<sup>7</sup> Most of these children are aged 14 or older.

Figure 1. UAC Apprehensions by Country of Origin, FY2008-FY2014



Source: Prepared by Jamie L. Hutchinson, CRS Graphics Specialist. Data from Department of Homeland Security, United States Border Patrol, *Juvenile and Adult Apprehensions—Fiscal Year 2013*. (Data provided to CRS by request.)

Notes: FY2014 figures are October 1, 2013, to June 15, 2014, representing just over 2/3 of a fiscal year.

The number of unaccompanied children has increased in the past six years and has surged in this current year. In FY2008, the number apprehended by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

<sup>3</sup> For information on unaccompanied alien children, see CRS Report R43599, *Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview*, by Lisa Seghetti, Alison Siskin, and Ruth Ellen Wasem.

<sup>4</sup> *Alien*, a technical term appearing throughout the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), refers to a foreign national who is not a citizen or national of the United States. This report uses “unaccompanied alien children” and “unaccompanied children” interchangeably.

<sup>5</sup> 6 U.S.C. §279(g)(2).

<sup>6</sup> A juvenile is defined as an alien under the age of 18. 8 C.F.R. §263.3. In this report, the terms “juvenile,” “child,” and “minor” are used interchangeably.

<sup>7</sup> A juvenile is classified as *unaccompanied* if neither a parent nor a legal guardian is with the juvenile alien at the time of apprehension, or within a geographical proximity to quickly provide care for the juvenile. 8 C.F.R. §236.3(b)(1).



totalled 8,041. In the first 8½ months of FY2014, apprehensions climbed to 52,000 (**Figure 1**).<sup>8</sup> Nationals of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico, have accounted for almost all unaccompanied alien children apprehended at the Mexico-U.S. border during this period.

In the past three years, apprehensions of Mexican unaccompanied children, which rose substantially in FY2009, have since varied between 12,000 and 17,000. In contrast, apprehensions of unaccompanied children from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have increased considerably during this period. In FY2009, Mexicans accounted for 82% of the 19,668 unaccompanied child apprehensions, while the Central American countries accounted for 17%. By the first eight months of FY2014, the proportions had almost reversed, with Mexican apprehensions comprising only 23% of the 52,000 UAC apprehensions, and UAC from the three Central American countries comprising 75% of the total. The total increase in apprehensions in the past three years stems mainly from large increases in the number of unaccompanied children from the three Central American countries.

The similarity of the trends characterizing apprehensions of unaccompanied alien children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and their stark divergence from those characterizing unaccompanied Mexican children suggests that factors specific to Central America's "northern triangle"<sup>9</sup> underlies the sudden surge in total unaccompanied child apprehensions. What follows is a discussion of possible causes originating in the countries themselves ("push factors") and other possible causes originating in the United States ("pull factors").

## **Conditions in Central America as Possible "Drivers" for Unaccompanied Child Migration**

Central America is a region encompassing seven countries of the isthmus between Mexico and South America: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama (**Figure 2**). The overwhelming majority of the unaccompanied child migrants apprehended in Mexico or at the U.S.-Mexico border have come from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, which are often referred to as the "northern triangle" countries of Central America. High violent crime rates, poor economic conditions fueled by relatively low economic growth rates, relatively high poverty rates, and the presence of transnational gangs appear to be some of the main distinguishing factors between these three northern triangle countries and other countries in the region.<sup>10</sup>

Unaccompanied child migrants' motives for emigrating appear to be multifaceted. In 2013, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conducted interviews with a representative group of about 400 unaccompanied minors from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, all of whom had arrived in the United States since FY2012.<sup>11</sup> Most of the unaccompanied minors

<sup>8</sup> If extrapolated at the same rate to the end of the fiscal year, the figure would reach roughly 73,000. News reports have cited an internal DHS memorandum estimating that FY2014 apprehensions could total 90,000. Alicia A. Caldwell, Associated Press, "Border Patrol resources stretched thin as children illegally enter U.S. alone," *PBS Newshour, The Rundown*, June 5, 2014.

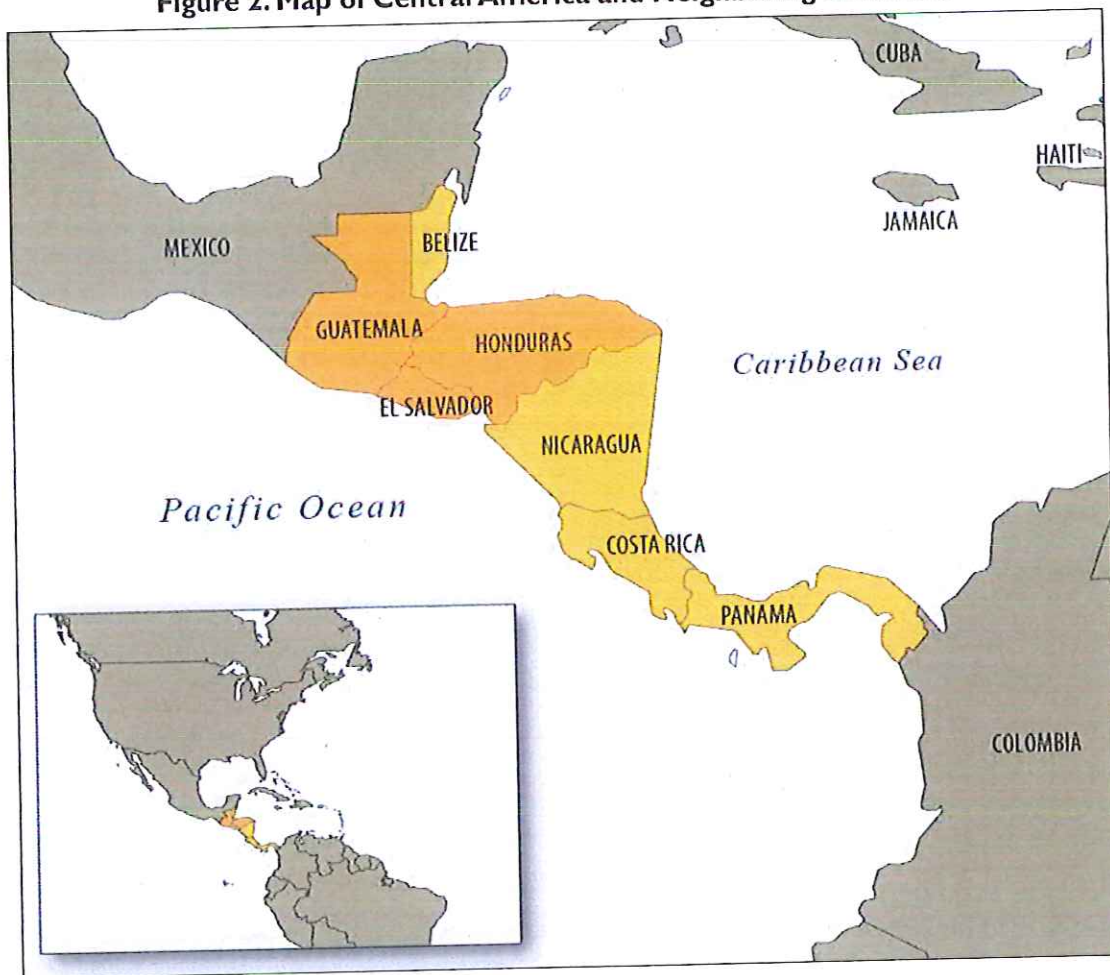
<sup>9</sup> This term is often used to refer to these three countries as a group.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see CRS Report R41731, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*, by Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke.

<sup>11</sup> U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection*, March 12, 2014, [http://www.unhcrwashington.org/sites/default/files/1\\_UAC\\_Children%20on%20the%20Run\\_Full%20Report.pdf](http://www.unhcrwashington.org/sites/default/files/1_UAC_Children%20on%20the%20Run_Full%20Report.pdf), (hereinafter referred to as "UNHCR, (continued...)")

provided multiple reasons for leaving their countries. Many left to reunite with family or pursue opportunities in the United States. Of those interviewed, 21% mentioned joining a family member, 51% mentioned economic opportunity, and 19% mentioned education.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 2. Map of Central America and Neighboring Countries**



Source: Prepared by Amber Hope Wilhelm, CRS Graphics Specialist.

Violence also played a large role in their decisions to emigrate. Nearly half of the children (48%) said they had experienced serious harm or had been threatened by organized criminal groups or state actors, and more than 20% had been subject to domestic abuse. As recently as 2006, only 13% of unaccompanied child migrants from Central America interviewed by UNHCR presented any indication they were fleeing societal violence or domestic abuse.

(...continued)

*Children on the Run*). Children interviewed were part of the increase in unaccompanied children beginning in FY2012. Almost all were interviewed while in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to which they are referred after apprehension. Children were identified by a random selection process that accounted for age, nationality, sex, and date of U.S. arrival. For more on the study's methodology, see pp. 18-22. Caution must be used in generalizing a single study to the entire population of unaccompanied children.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



Endemic poverty also appears to play a role in the emigration of unaccompanied minors, as 16% of those interviewed mentioned economic deprivation as a motive. There is some variation depending on country of origin, with Salvadorans being more likely to cite societal violence and Guatemalans being more likely to cite economic deprivation as motives for emigration (see Table 1).<sup>13</sup> Other studies involving interviews with unaccompanied children yield similar results.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1. Primary Reasons Unaccompanied Children Emigrate**  
(Percentage of minors interviewed by UNHCR in 2013 citing each factor)

Country of Origin	Societal Violence	Domestic Abuse	Economic Deprivation or Social Exclusion	Family or Opportunities in the United States	Other
El Salvador	66%	20%	7%	80%	35%
Guatemala	20%	23%	29%	84%	39%
Honduras	44%	24%	21%	82%	34%
Mexico	59%	17%	7%	80%	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>35%</b>

Source: UNHCR, *Children on the Run*.

Notes: Sums exceed 100% since the majority of the children interviewed provided multiple reasons for emigrating. Column categories were grouped by source author, and more detailed reasons cannot be provided.

## Economic Stagnation and Poverty

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are each considered lower middle income economies by the World Bank. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014 is estimated to be \$4,014 in El Salvador, \$3,684 in Guatemala, and \$2,368 in Honduras.<sup>15</sup> The countries have maintained what are viewed by most economists as generally sound macroeconomic policies in recent years, and enjoyed stable economic growth until the onset of the global financial crisis and U.S. recession in 2009. At that time, the Salvadoran and Honduran economies contracted and the Guatemalan economy slowed significantly, demonstrating how all three countries are vulnerable to external shocks as a result of their open economies<sup>16</sup> and close ties to the United States.<sup>17</sup> Although all three economies have rebounded since 2010, growth rates have yet to fully recover (see Figure 3). El Salvador posted an economic growth rate of just 1.6% in 2013, the lowest of any country in Central America.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Women's Refugee Commission, *Forced from Home: The Lost Boys and Girls of Central America*, October 2012; and Elizabeth G. Kennedy, "'No Place for Children': Central America's Youth Exodus," *InSight Crime*, June 23, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2014, accessed June 2014.

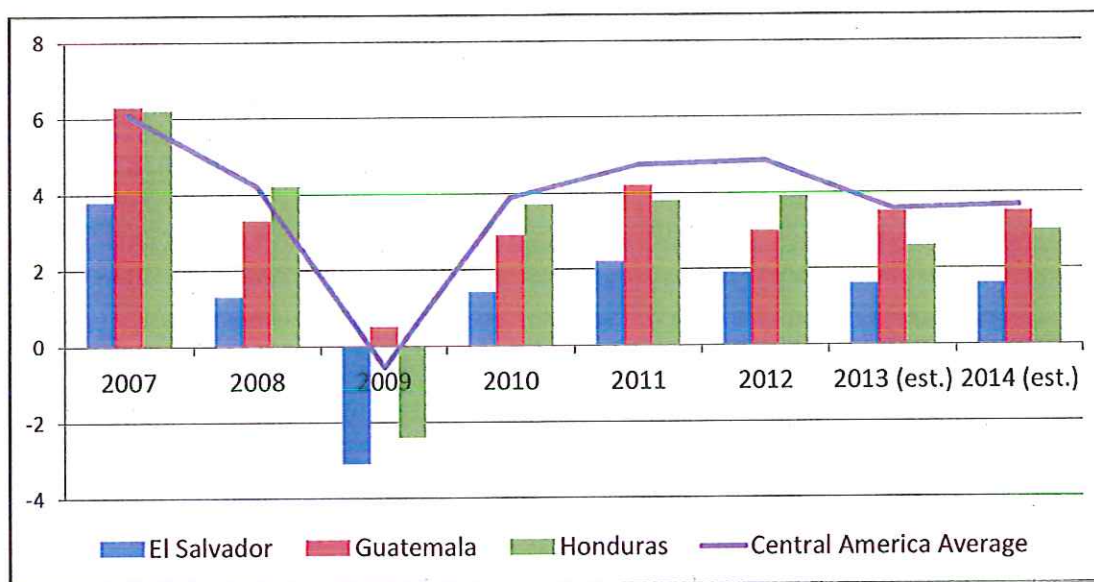
<sup>16</sup> An open economy is an economy with relatively few barriers to trade or investment (as opposed to a closed or protectionist economy). Open economies are more integrated into the international market than closed economies, and thus more vulnerable to external shocks.

<sup>17</sup> Close ties means the countries are heavily reliant on exports to the United States, remittances from the United States, and investment from the United States.

<sup>18</sup> IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2014, accessed June 2014.

Economic growth in the region has been inhibited by slow economic growth in major markets (Europe, China, the United States) as well as domestic factors, such as a coffee rust (*roya fungus*) outbreak, hurricanes and other natural disasters, and weak productivity.<sup>19</sup> The coffee rust epidemic, which in 2013 affected 74% of the coffee crop in El Salvador, 70% of the coffee crop in Guatemala, and 25% of the coffee crop in Honduras, led to nearly 200,000 jobs being lost across the three countries.<sup>20</sup> Employment and wages in the coffee sector have continued to fall over the past year, depriving many poor households of a significant source of income.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 3. Annual Percentage Change in Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP): 2007-2014**



**Source:** International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2014, accessed June 2014.

**Note:** Growth rates for 2013 and 2014 are IMF estimates.

Central American countries are also vulnerable to other types of natural disasters. For example, a tropical storm that hit El Salvador in 2011 caused more than \$800 million in damage to roads, infrastructure, and agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

The northern triangle countries also struggle with low productivity rates, particularly when compared to competitors in East Asia. Tariff preferences provided through the Dominican

<sup>19</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Reports on El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras*, June 2014.

<sup>20</sup> The coffee rust epidemic is also a problem in the rest of Central America but Costa Rica, Panama, and to a certain extent, Nicaragua can handle such economic and natural disaster shocks more effectively because of their comparatively well developed economies, lower levels of poverty, and/or stronger social safety nets.

<sup>21</sup> International Coffee Organization, *Report on the Outbreak of Coffee Leaf Rust in Central America and Action Plan to Combat the Pest*, May 13, 2013, p. 3; Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), *Coffee Producer and Laborer Income to Decline for a Second Consecutive Year*, Special Report: Central America, February 2014, [http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FEWS%20NET%20coffee%20rust%20shock%20report%20update\\_2014\\_02\\_en\\_0.pdf](http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FEWS%20NET%20coffee%20rust%20shock%20report%20update_2014_02_en_0.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Revision of the Flash Appeal for El Salvador 2011," press release, December 7, 2011.



Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) appear to be important in keeping apparel producers in those countries competitive in the U.S. market.<sup>23</sup>

Economic growth and slightly higher levels of social investment have led to improved social conditions in the region over the past decade. Nevertheless, poverty remains widespread. According to the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), about 45% of Salvadorans, 55% of Guatemalans, and 67% of Hondurans live in poverty. Guatemala and Honduras have the highest income disparities in Central America, exacerbated by the social exclusion of indigenous people and ethnic minorities.<sup>24</sup> The top 10% of earners account for 47% of national income in Guatemala and 43% of national income in Honduras.<sup>25</sup>

## Crime and Violence

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have long struggled to address high levels of crime and violence, but the deterioration in security conditions has accelerated over the past decade.<sup>26</sup> Counternarcotics efforts in Colombia and Mexico have put pressure on drug traffickers in those countries, leading some to battle over territory in Central America—a region with fewer resources and weaker institutions dedicated to addressing criminal activity.<sup>27</sup> Increasing flows of illicit narcotics have coincided with rising levels of violence and have contributed to the corruption of government officials.

Gangs such as *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and the “18<sup>th</sup> Street” gang (M-18) also play a major role in crime and violence in the northern triangle region, but are not significantly present in other Central American countries.<sup>28</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> Street gang was formed by Mexican youth in the Rampart section of Los Angeles in the 1960s who were not accepted into existing Hispanic gangs. MS-13 was created during the 1980s by Salvadorans in Los Angeles who had fled the country’s civil conflict.<sup>29</sup> Both gangs later expanded their operations to Central America. This process accelerated after the United States began deporting illegal immigrants, many with criminal convictions, back to the northern triangle region after the passage of the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996.<sup>30</sup> In general, Central American

<sup>23</sup> If apparel produced in Asian countries gains duty-free access to the U.S. market through the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP), it could displace apparel manufactured with U.S. fabric in Central America, causing job losses in those industries. CRS Report R42694, *The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Negotiations and Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Ian F. Fergusson; and CRS Report R42772, *U.S. Textile Manufacturing and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations*, by Michaela D. Platzer.

<sup>24</sup> Poverty rates are 17.8% in Costa Rica, 25.3% in Panama, and 58.3% in Nicaragua. Figures for Belize are unavailable. U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America 2013*, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013*, December 2013.

<sup>26</sup> For more information, see CRS Report R41731, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*, by Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Shifter, “Central America’s Security Predicament,” *Current History*, February 1, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> For background, see CRS Report RL34112, *Gangs in Central America*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

<sup>29</sup> For the history and evolution of these gangs, see Tom Diaz, *No Boundaries: Transnational Latino Gangs and American Law Enforcement*, Ann Arbor, M.I.: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> IIRIRA expanded the categories of noncitizens subject to deportation and made it more difficult for foreign nationals to get relief from removal.



countries whose migrants did not emigrate to the Los Angeles area, such as Nicaragua or Panama, did not receive large numbers of gang-deportees in the 1990s.<sup>31</sup>

The MS-13 and 18<sup>th</sup> Street gangs engage in a variety of activities, such as kidnapping, extortion, and forced recruitment, which often have more of an impact on the day-to-day lives of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans than drug-trafficking.<sup>32</sup> On October 11, 2012, the Treasury Department designated the MS-13 as a significant transnational criminal organization whose assets would be targeted for economic sanctions pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13581.<sup>33</sup> State Department officials have estimated that roughly 85,000 members of MS-13 and M-18 reside in the northern triangle countries, with the highest per capita concentration in El Salvador.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 2. Estimated Homicide Rates in Central America and Mexico: 2007-2012**  
(Homicides per 100,000 people)

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Belize	33.9	35.1	32.2	41.8	39.2	44.7
Costa Rica	8.3	11.3	11.4	11.3	10.0	8.5
El Salvador	57.1	51.7	70.9	64.1	69.9	41.2
Guatemala	43.4	46.1	46.5	41.6	38.6	39.9
Honduras	50.0	60.8	70.7	81.8	91.4	90.4
Nicaragua	12.8	13.0	14.0	13.5	12.5	11.3
Panama	12.7	18.4	22.6	20.6	20.3	17.2
Mexico	7.8	12.2	17.0	21.8	22.8	21.5

**Source:** U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data*, March 2014, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf).

**Note:** 2012 is the most recent year for which comparable data are available at this time.

Over the past decade, homicide rates have increased significantly in Honduras and remained at elevated levels in El Salvador and Guatemala. According to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2012 (the most recent year for which comparable data are available), the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants stood at 90.4 in Honduras, 41.2 in El Salvador, and 39.9 in Guatemala (see **Table 2**).<sup>35</sup> Although local statistics suggest that homicide rates declined slightly in each of the

<sup>31</sup> Ana Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Of the unaccompanied minors interviewed by UNHCR, 27% reported that they had been harmed or threatened by gangs. This includes nearly 62% of the Salvadorans. UNHCR, 2014, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> The criteria established for declaring a transnational criminal organization pursuant to Executive Order 13581 are available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/07/25/executive-order-blocking-property-transnational-criminal-organizations>. U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization," press release, October 11, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Gangs, Youth, and Drugs – Breaking the Cycle of Violence," Remarks by William R. Brownfield, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, at the Institute of the Americas, press release, October 1, 2012. In 2012, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated total MS-13 and M-18 membership in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras at a more modest 54,000. UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: a Threat Assessment*, September 2012.

<sup>35</sup> By comparison, the rates for Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama were 45, 9, 11 and 17. UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data*, March 2014, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf).

three countries in 2013, they remain among the highest in the world. Moreover, there are indications that the homicide rate has begun to climb once again in El Salvador as the gang truce that has been in effect since 2012 has unraveled.<sup>36</sup> Other crimes, such as theft and extortion, also remain at elevated levels. In 2012, 29% of Salvadorans, 34% of Guatemalans, and 32% of Hondurans reported that someone in their household had been the victim of some form of crime within the previous 12 months.<sup>37</sup>

Many children also must contend with violence at home. Although domestic abuse—including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse—often goes unreported and undocumented, it is believed to be widespread in the region.<sup>38</sup> According to scholars, Central American cultural norms legitimize the use of violence in interpersonal relationships, including physical discipline of children and violence against women.<sup>39</sup> Studies have found that children who are left behind as a result of one or both parents migrating abroad are more vulnerable to abuse. This is especially true of children whose mothers have migrated.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Unaccompanied Migrant Children: Why Not from the Rest of Central America?**

In FY2012, the number of unaccompanied children apprehended at the U.S. border originating from the northern triangle countries ranged from about 3,000 to 4,000 per country. That same year, there were only 4 unaccompanied children from Belize, 5 from Costa Rica, 43 from Nicaragua, and none from Panama.<sup>41</sup>

Many observers speculate that children are not migrating from Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama because those countries have experienced greater economic growth and/or less crime and violence than the northern triangle countries. In 2013, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that economic growth rates in the northern triangle countries ranged from 1.6% to 3.5%. Most of the other countries' rates were indeed higher: Belize grew by an estimated 1.6%, Costa Rica grew by an estimated 3.5%, Nicaragua grew by an estimated 4.2%, and Panama grew by an estimated 8%.<sup>42</sup> Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in three of these four countries is higher than in the northern triangle as well: Belize's per capita GDP is \$4,659, Costa Rica's is \$10,892, and Panama's is \$11,824. About 18% of Costa Rica's population and 25% of Panama's live in poverty, the lowest poverty rates in the isthmus.<sup>43</sup> Although Nicaragua's per capita GDP is lower than all the other Central American countries, at \$1,929, and its poverty rate of 58% is closer to that of Guatemala (55%), it has social welfare programs that provide many services to mitigate its poverty to some degree. The Nicaraguan economy has also been expanding in recent years.

Most of these non-northern triangle countries can also be characterized as less violent than their neighbors. Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama have the lowest levels of homicides in Central America (although Belize has the second-highest rate in the region) (see Table 2). None of the four countries has the same degree of problems with gangs tied to larger and more organized U.S. gangs that their neighbors have; their gangs are more local.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>36</sup> CRS Report R43616, *El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; Carlos Martínez and José Luis Sanz, "Gobierno Desmantela la Tregua y los Homicidios Alcanzan 30 en un Día," *El Faro*, May 24, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> By comparison, the figures for Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama were 15%, 34%, 25%, and 11%, respectively. Mitchell A. Seligson, Amy Erica Smith, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, eds., *The Political Culture of Democracy in the Americas, 2012: Towards Equality of Opportunity*, LAPOP, January 25, 2013, p. 144.

<sup>38</sup> Isabel Aguilar Umaña and Jeanne Ridders, *Nine Strategies to Prevent Youth Violence in Central America*, Interpeace, April 2012, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> World Bank, *Crime and Violence in Central America*, September 2010, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> Caroline Bakker, Martina Elings-Pels, and Michele Reis, *The Impact of Migration on Children in the Caribbean*, U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), Paper No. 4, August 2009, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Border Patrol, "Unaccompanied Children (Age 0-17) Apprehensions, FY2008 through FY2012," February 4, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America 2013*, p. 50. (In this section, Belize is not listed if data for it were unavailable.)

<sup>43</sup> ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2013*, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> See CRS Report RL34112, *Gangs in Central America*, by Clare Ribando Seelke, pp. 3-4.



## Migration Transit Zone Conditions and Mexico's Migration Policies

Conditions of migration facing unaccompanied children likely play a considerable role in determining whether they emigrate to the United States. While the persistence of economic stagnation, poverty, and criminal violence may explain why flows of unaccompanied minors have increased, the journey through Central America and Mexico to the United States has become more costly and dangerous. Unauthorized migrants from Central America, often lacking legal protection in Mexico because of their immigration status, have reportedly become increasingly vulnerable to human trafficking, kidnapping, and other abuses.<sup>45</sup> Corrupt Mexican officials have been found to be complicit in activities such as robbery and abuse of authority.<sup>46</sup> While Mexico has stepped up immigration enforcement in some areas (see below), enforcement along train routes frequently used by Central American child migrants continues to be lacking.<sup>47</sup>

As U.S. border security has tightened, more unauthorized Central American migrants have reportedly turned to smugglers (*coyotes*),<sup>48</sup> who in turn must pay money to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) such as Los Zetas, to lead them through Mexico and across the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>49</sup> The Administration has estimated that 75-80% of unaccompanied child migrants are now traveling with smugglers.<sup>50</sup> Some smugglers have reportedly sold migrants into situations of forced labor or prostitution (forms of human trafficking) in order to recover their costs; other smugglers' failure to pay Los Zetas has reportedly resulted in massacres of groups of migrants.<sup>51</sup> Mass grave sites where migrants have been executed by TCOs have been recovered in recent years.

The Mexican government appears to be attempting to balance enforcement and humanitarian concerns in its migration policies. Implementation of its new laws and policies has been criticized both by those who favor more enforcement and those who favor more migrants' rights.<sup>52</sup> In addition to stepping up efforts against human trafficking and passing new laws to stiffen penalties for alien smuggling (2010) and human trafficking (2012), Mexico enacted a comprehensive migration reform law in 2011 and secondary legislation to implement that law in 2012. Previously, Mexico's immigration law, the General Population Act (GPA) of 1974, limited legal immigration and restricted the rights of foreigners in Mexico, with unauthorized migrants subject to criminal penalties. In 2008, the Mexican Congress reformed the GPA to decriminalize simple

<sup>45</sup> Steven Dudley, *Transnational Crime in Mexico and Central America: Its Evolution and Role in International Migration*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars & Migration Policy Institute, November 2012, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/transnational\\_crime\\_mexico\\_centralamerica.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/transnational_crime_mexico_centralamerica.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Adam Isacson, Maureen Meyer, and Gabriela Morales, *Mexico's Other Border: Security, Migration, and the Humanitarian Crisis as the Line with Central America*, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), June 2014, available at [http://www.wola.org/news/new\\_wola\\_report\\_mexicos\\_other\\_border](http://www.wola.org/news/new_wola_report_mexicos_other_border) (hereinafter referred to as WOLA, *Mexico's Other Border Security*).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Human smuggling typically involves the provision of a service, generally procurement or transport, to people who knowingly consent to that service in order to gain illegal entry into a foreign country. For more information, see CRS Report RL34317, *Trafficking in Persons: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, by Alison Siskin and Liana Rosen.

<sup>49</sup> See Caitlin Dickson, "How Mexico's Cartels are Behind the Border Kid Crisis," *The Daily Beast*, June 23, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> White House, Office of the Vice President, "Remarks to the Press with Q&A by Vice President Joe Biden in Guatemala," press release, June 20, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Oscar Martinez, "How the Zetas Tamed Central America's 'Coyotes,'" *Insight Crime*, May 1, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> WOLA, *Mexico's Other Border Security*.



migration offenses, making unauthorized migrants subject to fines and deportation, but no longer subject to imprisonment. In May 2011, it passed a broader reform of the GPA.<sup>53</sup>

Contrary to some media reports, Mexico's 2011 law did not create a transit visa for migrants crossing through Mexico, as civil society groups had been advocating. As a result of the law, Mexico now requires visas for Central Americans entering its territory (aside from those on temporary work permits or those possessing a valid U.S. visa).

According to many migration experts, implementation of Mexico's 2011 migration law has been uneven. While some purges of corrupt staff within the National Migration Institute (INM) in the Interior Ministry have occurred in the past year, implementation of the migration law has been hindered by the government's failure to more fully overhaul INM.<sup>54</sup> Some experts maintain that Mexico lacks the funding and institutions to address traditional migration flows, much less the increasing numbers of U.S.-bound unaccompanied children that its agents are detaining. Mexico has only two shelters for migrant children and no foster care system in which to place those who might be granted asylum.

Despite provisions to improve migrants' rights included in the 2011 migration law, the Mexican government also continues to remove large numbers of Central American adult migrants, arrest smugglers of those migrants, and return unaccompanied child migrants to Central America.<sup>55</sup> According to INM, Mexico detained 86,929 foreigners in 2013, 80,079 of whom were removed (79,416 people were removed in 2012). Of those who were removed, some 97.4% originated in the northern triangle countries of Central America. In the first four months of 2014, Mexico removed some 24,000 people from the northern triangle countries, 9% more than during that period in 2013.<sup>56</sup> Child protection officers from INM accompanied 8,577 children to their countries of origin in 2013 and 6,330 from January through May 2014; 99% of those children originated in northern triangle countries.<sup>57</sup>

With U.S. support, the Mexican government in 2013 started implementing a southern border security plan that has involved the establishment of 12 naval bases on the country's rivers and three security cordons that stretch more than 100 miles north of the Mexico-Guatemala and Mexico-Belize borders.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Mexico's 2011 migration reform was aimed at (1) guaranteeing the rights and protection of all migrants in Mexico; (2) simplifying Mexican immigration law in order to facilitate legal immigration; (3) establishing the principles of family reunification and humanitarian protection as key elements of the country's immigration policy; and (4) concentrating immigration enforcement authority within the National Migration Institute (INM) in the Interior Ministry in order to improve migration management and reduce abuses of migrants by police and other officials. For a general description of the law in English, see Gobierno Federal de México, "Mexico's New Law on Migration," September 2011, available at <http://usmex.ucsd.edu/assets/028/12460.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Reforms that migration experts have recommended include raising hiring standards for immigration agents, regulating how migrants should be treated, and strengthening internal and external controls over migration agents. Sonja Wolf et. al., *Assessment of the National Migration Institute: Towards an Accountability System for Migrant Rights in Mexico*, INSIDE, 2014.

<sup>55</sup> From January through May 2014, the Mexican government arrested 431 people for breaking provisions in the migration law; most of those individuals were accused of smuggling-related crimes. Gobierno de Mexico, Sistema Institucional de Información Estadística (SIIE), "Incidencia Delictiva del Fuero Federal, 2014."

<sup>56</sup> Gobierno de Mexico, Secretaría de Gobernación, Instituto Nacional de Migración, *Boletín de Estadística Migratorias*, 2013. 2014 statistics are available at <http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/>.

<sup>57</sup> Gobierno de Mexico, Secretaría de Gobernación, Instituto Nacional de Migración, "Reintegra INM a Más de 14 Mil Niños Migrantes con sus Familias," Boletín 31/14, June 11, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> The State Department has provided \$6.6 million of mobile Non-Intrusive Inspection Equipment (NIEE) and approximately \$3.5 million in mobile kiosks, operated by Mexico's National Migration Institute, that capture the (continued...)

## Factors in the United States Associated with Immigration of Unaccompanied Children

Forces that potentially attract unaccompanied children to the United States may be more subjective than forces that cause them to leave their home countries. Unlike the prevalence of actual violence or deprivation associated with daily economic hardship, for instance, the perception of economic opportunity or the chance to obtain legal authorization to live in the United States may often conflict with what is legally and actually possible. Several reports suggest that migrant smugglers prey on potential migrants' desperation by misleading them with false information about such possibilities.<sup>59</sup>

Immigration observers have made numerous, sometimes conflicting assertions of the importance of one or another pull factor, relying on a range of empirical evidence. Despite considerable public attention, the precise combination of motives driving unaccompanied children to migrate to the United States remains unclear. The discussion below considers three widely cited motivations: economic and educational opportunity, family reunification, and recent U.S. immigration policies.

### Economic and Educational Opportunity<sup>60</sup>

Unaccompanied children regularly cite economic opportunity in the United States as a reason for their emigration north.<sup>61</sup> Since almost all are school-aged children, it remains unclear how this stated aspiration should be interpreted. Given endemic poverty in northern triangle countries, slow economic growth, and the large and long-standing income disparity between the triangle countries and the United States, it remains unclear the extent to which fluctuations in economic conditions in the United States actually affect children's migration decisions.

In the United States, current employment levels for minority youth are low relative to all other labor market groups.<sup>62</sup> In the immediate term, the potential for unaccompanied children to participate in the U.S. labor market is constrained in most cases by lack of English language skills, limited educational attainment, and, given their age, the extent to which U.S. laws permit their labor force participation.<sup>63</sup> Assuming they found employment, such constraints would likely relegate them to low-skilled, low-wage sectors of the U.S. economy.

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biometric and biographic data of individuals transiting southern Mexico. Total State Department support is likely to reach at least \$86.6 million. The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has also provided training to troops patrolling the border, communications equipment, and support for the development of Mexico's air mobility and surveillance capabilities. WOLA, op. cit. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "INL Assistance for Mexico's Southern Border Strategy," fact sheet, June 2014. For background, see CRS Report R41349, *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin Finklea.

<sup>59</sup> The White House, Office of the Vice President, "Readout of the Vice President's Meetings on Unaccompanied Minors and Immigration Reform," press release, June 26, 2014; and "Under-age and on the move: A wave of unaccompanied children swamps the debate over immigration," *The Economist*, June 28, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Craig Elwell, Specialist in Macroeconomic Policy, Government and Finance Division, and Michael Garcia, Attorney in the American Law Division, both contributed to this section.

<sup>61</sup> UNHCR, *Children on the Run*.

<sup>62</sup> CRS Report R42519, *Youth and the Labor Force: Background and Trends*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara.

<sup>63</sup> The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) sets 14 years of age as the minimum age for employment, and limits the (continued...)



Apart from what unaccompanied children cite as pull factors, U.S. labor market conditions likely affect their parents and relatives residing in the United States, which in turn, may play a critical role in the recent surge. Improving employment prospects, for instance, could more readily provide parents with the means to afford the expense of their children's migration to this country and lead to greater desire for family reunification as discussed below.<sup>64</sup>

At a national level, macroeconomic data on the U.S. economy indicate that despite overall improvement, considerable slack remains in labor markets, with labor force participation remaining weak and the unemployment rate and other measures of labor force utilization remaining well above most estimates of the long-run sustainable rate.<sup>65</sup>

Labor market conditions for low-skilled workers are especially challenging. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) employment data by educational attainment show that employment for workers with less than a high school diploma<sup>66</sup> fell by about 5 million jobs between 2007 and 2014.<sup>67</sup> Thus, despite some indications of economy-wide recovery and U.S. labor market improvement, the demand for low-skill workers has not recovered over the same period that has witnessed the surge of unaccompanied children.

Regarding unauthorized workers, while extensive academic scholarship has analyzed their role, impact, and prospects in the U.S. labor force, government reporting is hindered by data limitations. Government statistics, as a rule, do not capture legal status of the foreign-born workforce. Therefore, assessing how U.S. economic conditions serve as a magnet for typically low-skilled and often unauthorized workers cannot be measured directly and is usually estimated or inferred by assessing the employment outlook of industrial sectors most likely to employ low skilled and unauthorized workers.

Research from the Pew Hispanic Center, which produces authoritative statistics on the unauthorized population, suggests that unauthorized workers concentrate in four low-skilled industrial sectors: farming; building, grounds-keeping and maintenance; construction; and food preparation and serving.<sup>68</sup> With the exception of farming, the BLS projects that these occupations are expected to grow close to or above the average rate of all occupations in the coming decade.<sup>69</sup>

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number of hours worked by minors under the age of 16. Unauthorized minors who file affirmatively for asylum may apply for work authorization after six months. For more information on asylum, see CRS Report RL32621, *U.S. Immigration Policy on Asylum Seekers*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem.

<sup>64</sup> Smuggling an unauthorized migrant from Central America can cost as much as \$10,000. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Smuggling of migrants: the harsh search for a better life*, 2014, <http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/migrant-smuggling.html>, accessed by CRS on June 27, 2014; and Bryan Roberts, Gordon Hanson, and Derekh Cornwell, et al., *An Analysis of Migrant Smuggling Costs along the Southwest Border*, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, Working Paper, November 2010.

<sup>65</sup> CRS Report R43476, *Returning to Full Employment: What Do the Indicators Tell Us?*, by Marc Labonte.

<sup>66</sup> Half of all Central American foreign-born adults living in the United States lacked a high school diploma in 2010. See CRS Report R41592, *The U.S. Foreign-Born Population: Trends and Selected Characteristics*, by William A. Kandel, p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey*, Table A-4, available at <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab4.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> These four sectors accounted for an estimated 73% of all unauthorized worker employment. Pew Hispanic Center, *Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*, by Jeffrey S. Passel, and D'Vera Cohn, April 14, 2009.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Projections: 2012-2022 Summary*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm>, accessed June 27, 2014.



Hence, the economic prospects for low-skilled, low-wage, and typically unauthorized workers appears mixed. While employment in low-skilled sectors of the economy has suffered more and recovered less than that of other sectors in the past seven years since the economic downturn, the employment prospects for the economic sectors most likely to employ such workers appears on par with or above the national average. Nonetheless, perceptions of opportunities may have greater impact than fluctuations in U.S. economic and labor market conditions.

Unaccompanied children also cite educational opportunity in the United States as a reason for their emigration north.<sup>70</sup> Unauthorized aliens in the United States are able to receive free public education through high school. In 1982, the Supreme Court's decision in *Plyler v. Doe* prohibited states from restricting access of children to public elementary and secondary education on the basis of immigration status.

The Court's ruling did not concern access to higher education, however, and both the federal government and some states have adopted measures that limit unlawfully present aliens' eligibility for admission to public institutions of higher education, in-state tuition, or financial aid.<sup>71</sup>

## Family Reunification

Family reunification is often cited as a primary reason for the recent large-scale migration of unaccompanied children to the United States.<sup>72</sup> Surveyed unaccompanied children cite family reunification as one of the main reasons for migrating to the United States.<sup>73</sup> The desire to reunite with family stems from family separation that occurs when one or both parents migrate to a destination country for more remunerative employment. Prior to the mid-1990s, migrants from Mexico and Central America who worked in the United States often returned regularly to be with their families in their origin countries.<sup>74</sup> Increased border enforcement in the mid-1990s gradually made unauthorized entry into the United States more difficult and expensive, which had the unintended consequence of creating a "caging effect" by encouraging unauthorized aliens to settle permanently in the United States rather than working temporarily and regularly returning home.<sup>75</sup>

Demographic and survey data provide evidence of sizable linkages between the three countries dominating the recent spike in unaccompanied child apprehensions and their foreign-born

<sup>70</sup> UNHCR, *Children on the Run*.

<sup>71</sup> For more information, see CRS Report RL33863, *Unauthorized Alien Students: Issues and "DREAM Act" Legislation*, by Andorra Bruno; and "Noncitizens and Eligibility for HEA Federal Student Aid Programs" in CRS Report R43302, *Postsecondary Education Issues in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress*, coordinated by David P. Smole.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance, Muzaffar Chishti and Faye Hipsman, "Dramatic Surge in the Arrival of Unaccompanied Children Has Deep Roots and No Simple Solutions," *Migration Information Source*, June 13, 2014; and "Under-age and on the move: A wave of unaccompanied children swamps the debate over immigration," *The Economist*, June 28, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> UNHCR, *Children on the Run*.

<sup>74</sup> Such migration patterns are fairly universal. See for example, "When Mothers and Fathers Migrate North: Caretakers, Children, and Child Rearing in Guatemala", by Michelle J. Moran-Taylor, in *Latin American Perspectives*, (Vol. 35, No. 4, July, 2008), pp. 79-95; for a broader treatment, see Douglas S. Massey, "World in Patterns and Processes of International Migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Paper prepared for Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 4, 2003.

<sup>75</sup> CRS Report R42138, *Border Security: Immigration Enforcement Between Ports of Entry*, by Lisa Seghetti. For more on how U.S. immigration policy affected migration flows, see Wayne Cornelius, "Evaluating Recent US Immigration Control Policy: What Mexican Migrants Can Tell Us," in *Crossing and Controlling Borders: Immigration Policies and Their Impact on Migrants' Journeys*, ed. Mechthild Baumann, Astrid Lorenz, and Kerstin Rosenhow (Farmington, MI: Budrich Unipress Ltd, 2011); Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2002).



populations living in the United States. In 2012, the foreign-born populations from El Salvador (1,254,501), Guatemala (880,869), and Honduras (535,725) ranked as the 6<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> largest groups, respectively, of all foreign born groups.<sup>76</sup> From the perspective of the source country, U.N. survey data indicate that sizable percentages of children residing in these three countries have at least one parent living in the United States.<sup>77</sup> Were data available on other relatives living in the United States, such as siblings or extended relatives, these percentages would be higher.

The desire for family reunification is also driven by the perception that children who are not immediately returned to their home countries can reside with their family members for periods extending several years, as discussed below under “U.S. Immigration Policies.” Upon apprehension, unaccompanied children are immediately given a *Notice to Appear* (NTA) before an immigration judge who will adjudicate their case to remain in the United States.<sup>78</sup> Receipt of an NTA indicates the start of immigration proceedings.

Yet, by law, persons apprehended by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and whom CBP determines to be unaccompanied children from countries other than Mexico and Canada, must be turned over to the care and custody of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) while they await their removal hearing.<sup>79</sup> Unaccompanied children are moved from the custody of the law enforcement agency that apprehended them to a human services agency experienced with child welfare and family reunification. ORR is required to place these children in the least restrictive setting possible that accounts for the child’s best interests.<sup>80</sup> In an estimated 90% of these cases, children are placed with parents, siblings, and extended relatives who currently reside in the United States.<sup>81</sup>

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) contains provisions allowing foreign nationals to reside lawfully in the United States if they are sponsored by parents and siblings who are U.S. citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents.<sup>82</sup> However, sizable proportions of these family members are estimated to be unauthorized aliens.<sup>83</sup> According to DHS, the estimated unauthorized

<sup>76</sup> Other Central American countries ranked considerably lower: Nicaraguans were 31<sup>st</sup>, Panamanians were 55<sup>th</sup>, Costa Rican were 67<sup>th</sup>, and Belizians were 86<sup>th</sup>. Mexicans represent the largest foreign-born population residing in the United States. For El Salvador, the population residing in the United States is one fifth the size of population living in El Salvador (6.3 million). Source: 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Micro Sample (PUMS).

<sup>77</sup> The figure is 49% in El Salvador, 27% in Guatemala and 47% in Honduras. By comparison, the figure for Mexico is 22%. Source: UNHCR, *Children on the Run*.

<sup>78</sup> For more information on the processing of unaccompanied alien children, see CRS Report R43599, *Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview*, by Lisa Seghetti, Alison Siskin, and Ruth Ellen Wasem.

<sup>79</sup> The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (HSA; P.L. 107-296) divided responsibilities for the processing and treatment of UAC between the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-457, Section 235) differentiated treatment according to whether or not unaccompanied children originated from the contiguous countries of Mexico and Canada. Unaccompanied alien children from Mexico and Canada may also be turned over to HHS-ORR if they are determined to be victims or potential victims of trafficking, if they claim asylum, or if they do not consent to return voluntarily.

<sup>80</sup> The TVPRA directed HHS to ensure that unaccompanied children “be promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child.” §§235(a)-235(d) of TVPRA; 8 U.S.C. §1232(b)(2). See also “What is the “best interest of the child” standard, and how does it apply to immigration detention and removal decisions?” in CRS Report R43623, *Unaccompanied Alien Children—Legal Issues: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions*, by Kate M. Manuel and Michael John Garcia.

<sup>81</sup> Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Unaccompanied Alien Children Program*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Fact Sheet, May 2014.

<sup>82</sup> See CRS Report R43145, *U.S. Family-Based Immigration Policy*, by William A. Kandel.

<sup>83</sup> As a policy, ORR does not inquire as to the legal status of the family member with whom the unaccompanied child is (continued...)



populations in 2012 of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans living in the United States was 690,000, 560,000, and 360,000, respectively, representing 55%, 64%, and 67% of all foreign-born residents from those three countries living in the United States.<sup>84</sup>

The length of time unaccompanied children can expect to wait until their removal hearing may play a role for incentivizing their migration to the United States. As of March 2014, the average wait time nationwide for all immigration proceedings was 19 months.<sup>85</sup> However, the length of time until a final judgment occurs varies widely depending on appeals and individual circumstances.<sup>86</sup> Surges in caseloads, such as that caused by the current influx of unaccompanied children, can also tax the limited resources of the immigration court system, further extending wait times for removal hearings, and possibly fostering a perception among foreign nationals that a unique opportunity exists to exploit this administrative backlog. Rumors of these backlogs and the potential for being reunited with family—even if temporarily—reportedly have reached emigrant-sending communities in Central America.<sup>87</sup>

## U.S. Immigration Policies

The possible relationship between U.S. immigration policies (actual policies as well as perceptions of policies) and the surge in arrivals of unaccompanied children has been the subject of heated discussion among immigration observers and policy makers. It is not known if, and how, specific immigration policies may have influenced decisions to try to enter the United States unlawfully. News reports, however, suggest that perceptions of unspecified U.S. policies toward alien minors may have played a role. According to a June 2014 *New York Times* article:

[C]hildren, parents, immigration officials, lawyers and activists interviewed say that there has been a subtle shift in the way the United States treats minors.

That perception has inspired parents who have not seen their children for years to hire so-called coyotes, guides often associated with organized crime, to bring them north. It has prompted other parents to make the trip with toddlers in tow, something rarely seen before in the region.<sup>88</sup>

(...continued)

placed.

<sup>84</sup> Bryan Baker and Nancy Rytina, *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012*, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, March 2013. For comparison, the unauthorized proportion of the total foreign-born population for Mexico is 58%. These figures do not account for considerable numbers of U.S.-born children whose parents were born in these countries. For more on the demographics of legal status among the foreign-born, see CRS Report R41592, *The U.S. Foreign-Born Population: Trends and Selected Characteristics*, by William A. Kandel.

<sup>85</sup> This figure is based upon an analysis by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) of data obtained from the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) for all immigration cases, not just those involving unaccompanied children. See TRAC Immigration data, [http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/court\\_backlog](http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/court_backlog), accessed June 2014.

<sup>86</sup> The 19 month figure is an average for all immigration courts, and comprises a range of periods, some of which extend far beyond 19 months.

<sup>87</sup> Jennifer Scholtes, "CBP Chief: Policies may be Fueling Spike in Minors Crossing Border Illegally," *CQ Roll Call*, April 2, 2014; Julia Preston, "Hoping for Asylum, Migrants Strain U.S. Border," *New York Times*, April 10, 2014; David Nakamura, "Influx of Minors across Texas Border Driven by Belief They will be Allowed to Stay in U.S.," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Frances Robles, "Wave of Minors on Their Own Rush to Cross Southwest Border," *New York Times*, June 4, 2014, (hereinafter cited as Robles, *New York Times*).



# U.S. Customs and Border Protection

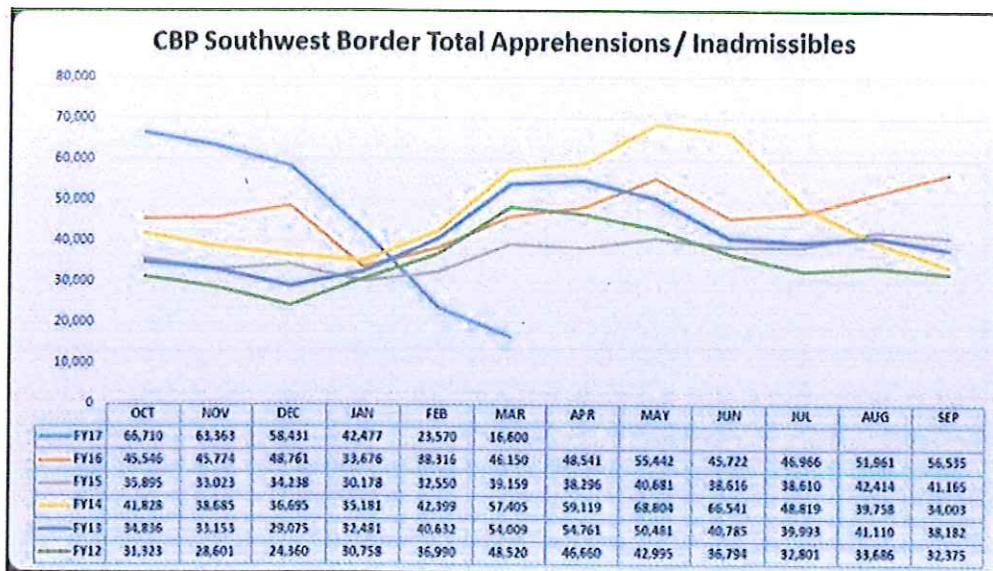


## Southwest Border Migration

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) continues to see a sharp decline in the number of individuals apprehended along the Southwest border, as well as a decrease in those found inadmissible at ports of entry on the Southwest border. In March 2017, 16,600 individuals were apprehended or deemed inadmissible, this is a 30% decrease from February 2017, and a 64% decrease from the same month in FY2016.

Since the Administration's implementation of Executive Orders to enforce immigration laws, the drop in apprehensions shows a marked change in trends.

As directed in DHS Secretary Kelly's memoranda implementing the President's executive orders, CBP will remain committed to carrying out fair, impartial and humane enforcement of the nation's immigration laws. CBP will remain vigilant to respond to any changes in trends, as numbers of illegal crossings typically increase between March and May.



U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions FY2017 YTD(October 1 - March 31)

USBP	Demographic	OCT	NOV	DEC
Southwest Border	UAC	6,707	7,349	7,190
	Family Units	13,116	15,588	16,139
Southwest Border Total Apprehensions		46,183	47,213	43,250

*\*Numbers are subject to change during agency reconciliation of individual records, these numbers reflect the current status and numbers as of 4/3/17.*

In March, a total of 12,193 individuals were apprehended between ports of entry on our Southwest Border, compared with 18,754 in February and 31,577 in January. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, USBP apprehended 408,870 individuals along our southwest border, compared to 331,333 in FY15, and 479,371 in FY14.



## EXCERPTS FROM PROPOSED REFUGEE ADMISSIONS 2016: REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

### AFRICA

There are currently some 4.3 million refugees across the African continent, constituting roughly 25 percent of the global refugee population. Refugee numbers in Africa increased by nearly 1 million in 2014 and 2015 to date due to new or intensified conflicts across the continent. At the same time, there have been only limited opportunities in Africa for local integration and refugee repatriation.

New and ongoing conflicts in four countries – Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, and South Sudan – are responsible for the rapid growth in refugee numbers in 2014 and 2015. In Burundi, 2015 election-related violence forced nearly 200,000 refugees to flee to neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Tanzania; this outflow is expected to continue to grow throughout 2015. In CAR, the overthrow of the government and widespread clashes between armed groups, together with earlier conflict, has now displaced nearly 440,000 Central Africans internally and forced over 460,000 to flee to neighboring Cameroon, Chad, the DRC, and Republic of the Congo.

Instability and violence in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger have displaced more than 1.5 million in northern Nigeria and sent some 200,000 refugees to neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Cameroon, Niger and Chad continue to struggle with rising numbers of internally displaced people as well. In South Sudan, conflict erupted in December 2013 between political factions and quickly escalated into a major conflict along ethnic lines. Over 1.5 million South Sudanese are internally displaced and total refugee numbers have now reached nearly 754,000.

Ongoing conflict in the DRC and Sudan has also continued to generate new refugee outflows over the past few years. Intensified conflict in eastern DRC since mid-2012 has led an additional 180,000 Congolese to seek asylum in Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, bringing the total number of Congolese refugees to nearly 514,000. In Sudan, ongoing fighting between armed groups in Darfur has resulted in some 30,000 new Darfuri refugees fleeing to Chad, bringing the total number to nearly 370,000. At the same time, the ongoing Sudanese conflict with rebel groups in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states has forced some 270,000 Sudanese refugees to flee to South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya since June 2011. The steady outflow of Eritreans also continues, not only to refugee camps in Ethiopia and eastern Sudan, but also further north as Eritreans attempt to migrate to Europe. More than 300,000 Eritreans have fled political repression, forced conscription, and economic collapse over the past decade with some 200,000 living as refugees in Africa.

Africa's refugee numbers have been augmented as well by conflicts outside of Africa, primarily in the neighboring Near East region. North Africa has long hosted large numbers of Palestinian refugees. The ongoing crisis in Syria has added more than 160,000 new refugees to the region



including 140,000 in Egypt and 18,000 in Libya. The new crisis in Yemen has led some 15,000 Yemenis and Somalis living in Yemen to flee to Djibouti and Somalia in 2015 to date, with higher numbers expected. No progress was made over the past year in seeking a resolution to the Western Saharan conflict that would enable an estimated 90,000 Sahrawi refugees in Algeria to return home.

Most African countries honor the principle of first asylum and most have allowed refugees to remain – and in many cases to effectively economically and/or socially integrate – until voluntary repatriation is possible. Some countries, such as Egypt and Sudan, have forcibly returned refugees over the past year. For countries growing weary of hosting large refugee caseloads, we continue to advocate for hospitality and first asylum for refugees. And, for those countries that lack formal mechanisms for asylum, we continue to advocate for the establishment of systems in consultation with UNHCR. Morocco in particular has made progress in this regard.

#### Voluntary Repatriation

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#### Local Integration

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#### Third-Country Resettlement

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### EAST ASIA

Several countries in East Asia host large and diverse refugee populations. Recent years have seen important developments for these groups. Thailand and Bangladesh continue to host large numbers of Burmese refugees and asylumseekers, and thousands of urban asylum seekers and refugees are in the capital cities of Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and New Delhi, including Burmese, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, West Africans, Syrians, Palestinians, and others. The number of persons of concern to UNHCR across the archipelago of Indonesia has also increased to nearly 12,000, including some 4,300 refugees, in recent years.

The U.S. government continues to press for meaningful political and democratic reforms in Burma, as well as a national ceasefire agreement with ethnic minority groups. The international community is engaged in discussions regarding the voluntary return of Burmese refugees, but acknowledges that ongoing conflict with armed ethnic groups, particularly in Kachin and Shan States, peace and national reconciliation efforts, and limited access to humanitarian and development assistance make large-scale return of refugees in safety and with dignity a slow, gradual process.

The resettlement of more than 100,000 Burmese refugees from Thailand since 2006 – including more than 77,000 to the United States – has significantly reduced the number of Burmese refugees in the camps who are eligible for the U.S. P-2 resettlement program. After more than seven years of large-scale resettlement, we have arrived at the natural conclusion of the group resettlement program with specific eligibility criteria for Burmese refugees who were reregistered by UNHCR in 2005 and formally registered by the Royal Thai Government (RTG). P-2 processing will continue until we have completed the processing of every application



received by the deadline in each camp. Those who do not exercise this option will be able to remain in the camps until safe and voluntary returns are possible. The United States will continue to accept individual referrals from UNHCR for all nationalities, including registered Burmese.

Since 2006, UNHCR Malaysia has operated the second largest refugee status determination program in the world and Malaysia is currently one of the largest resettlement countries in the U.S. program with some 9,000 projected refugee departures in FY15 and more than 53,000 since 2006. As of the end of March 2015, there were 152,574 persons of concern registered with UNHCR in Malaysia of which 141,568, or 92.8 percent, are from Burma. In addition, some 11,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from various countries – primarily Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Sri Lanka – are registered with UNHCR. Malaysia is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, but generally tolerates the presence of refugees.

The systematic and continuous persecution and discrimination of members of the Rohingya minority from Rakhine State, Burma have resulted in large numbers fleeing Rakhine State to seek safety in Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries in the region for over five decades. The mid-2015 migrant crisis in the Indian Ocean began to unfold on May 1 when Thai authorities discovered mass graves of migrants in Songkhla, Thailand and began cracking down on migrant smuggling operations. Because of this crackdown and significantly higher volumes of Rohingya seeking passage to Malaysia through smuggling networks, smugglers have taken to holding their ships at sea as they await conditions for disembarkation or sometimes abandon them. By May 10 over 4,100 people landed in Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Burma, and Thailand. On May 20, the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia and Indonesia and Thailand agreed to continue to provide humanitarian assistance and temporary shelter to some 7,000 migrants and asked the international community to take responsibility for the repatriation of the migrants or resettlement to third countries within a period of one year. The Administration is actively involved in supporting the regional response that stresses the need to address the root causes of the crisis in source countries, including by promoting and protecting the human rights of members of vulnerable populations in source countries.

The last large influx of approximately 250,000 Rohingya from Rakhine State to the Cox's Bazar district in southeastern Bangladesh began in July 1991. Since then, steady flows of Rohingya continue to arrive, with a spike following the June and October 2012 violence in Rakhine State when hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled to neighboring countries. Between 1992 and 2005, over 236,000 UNHCR-registered Rohingya refugees were voluntarily repatriated from Cox's Bazar to Rakhine State, most of them immediately after their arrival to Bangladesh. No repatriation operation has taken place since. UNHCR currently supports 32,600 refugees who remain in two official refugee camps (Kutupalong and Nayapara) in Cox's Bazar. In addition, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) estimates that 300,000 – 500,000 undocumented Rohingya currently reside in various villages and towns outside the refugee camps and in makeshift settlement sites. These makeshift sites include 42,000 unregistered Rohingya in the makeshift Kutupalong site (adjacent to the official Kutupalong refugee camp), 15,000 at the Leda site, and 9,000 at the Shamlapur site.



The cases of more than 500 Rohingya in Bangladesh, including 300 individuals approved for resettlement have been on hold since October 2010 when the GOB halted third-country resettlement activities pending a review of its refugee policy. In February 2014, the GOB announced its national strategy on “Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh.”

The U.S. government is encouraged by GOB commitments made in the national strategy, particularly to survey and list undocumented Rohingya and to allow third country resettlement to continue. We are prepared to resume resettlement activity immediately upon notification by the GOB that we may proceed. In addition, we expect ongoing UNHCR referrals of urban Burmese in India.

As reflected in the North Korean Human Rights Act, the United States remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation of North Koreans both inside the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and in various countries in the region. The United States began resettling interested, eligible North Korean refugees and their family members in 2006 and remains committed to continuing this program.

## EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Europe continues to host large refugee populations, as well as other persons affected by conflict, who, over the last two decades, have been left in situations of protracted displacement – some in dire conditions. In its 2014-15 Global Appeal, UNHCR reported on its priority of providing protection to millions of asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless individuals, or other persons of concern throughout Europe and Central Asia. Many had fled conflicts outside the region, such as in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, but hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs in the Balkans and Caucasus remain from yesterday’s wars.

Despite the fact that a majority of countries in the region are party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, compliance with these instruments remains problematic. UNHCR and other stakeholders continue to build protection capacity and are helping to strengthen asylum systems and protection laws in the region; however, many of these countries have been slow or reluctant to recognize and integrate refugees and other at-risk individuals. The protection provided by some governments in the region to refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants is limited and public intolerance, including attacks against members of minority populations, is common. There are documented cases of refoulement. UNHCR has been working with many of these governments to establish and/or reform asylum procedures and refugee protection laws.

The 1990’s break-up of the Soviet Union also created newly independent states with sizeable populations of stateless individuals due to gaps in nationality laws and inconsistent implementation of those laws. Difficulty in establishing citizenship at the time of succession has also created later problems for children born to an undocumented parent(s). The problem of statelessness remains in the region, although some states, such as Turkmenistan, have taken steps to register stateless individuals and facilitate their acquisition of nationality.

According to UNHCR, as of December 2014, there were approximately 365,710 refugees and IDPs in the Balkans, almost all of whom have been displaced for a decade or longer. An estimated 206,026 persons of this population are displaced from Kosovo, most of whom currently live in Serbia.

UNHCR estimates that more than 90,000 individuals in this group are in need of assistance. Since 2000, the overall level of return to Kosovo from Serbia has been low. There have been over 25,000 voluntary returns of minorities to Kosovo since the conflict ended, but housing, documentation issues, a lack of employment opportunity, and occasional violence directed against ethnic Serbs in Kosovo has limited continuing return prospects.

Since 2010, the countries of the region – with the assistance of the international community – made significant progress toward resolving a large part of the refugee situation in the Balkans. A November 2011 ministerial meeting in Belgrade brought together Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro to sign a Joint Declaration expressing their collective will to resolve the protracted refugee and displacement situation, and they committed their countries to a Regional Housing Program (RHP) for refugees and IDPs supported by international donors. The RHP was designed to create durable solutions for up to 74,000 of the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs in those countries. While principally affecting housing, the RHP has established the Regional Coordination Forum to discuss other pertinent issues such as unpaid pensions, civil documentation, exchange of data and other public information. An international donors' conference in April 2012 succeeded in raising over \$340 million (€260 million) to support the RHP over five years. The United States has provided \$20 million between FY12 and FY14, and U.S. involvement is seen as a critical ingredient to the RHP's success. With over a dozen projects approved and several well-underway, we expect FY15 and FY16 to be the years where we see construction commence in earnest.

Despite important steps taken by governments to assist individuals displaced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and related conflicts, IDPs and returnees still await housing compensation, restitution, or alternative accommodation provision in the North and South Caucasus. The NagornoKarabakh War displaced over 800,000 Azerbaijanis in several waves between 1988 and 1994. Today 600,000 IDPs remain, almost 7 percent of Azerbaijan's population. The vast majority live in temporary shelters, administrative buildings, dormitories, and hostels. The government is increasingly providing housing and livelihood support to vulnerable IDPs, but more needs to be done to support integration or aid its displaced population. Armenia received 350,000 refugees from Azerbaijan, of whom almost 3,000 remain as refugees. A large number emigrated to other countries, and nearly 90,000 were ultimately naturalized in Armenia. Many refugees and former refugees continue to live in unsuitable collective housing or remote villages with insufficient access to government services. A struggling economy and the recent influx of an estimated 16,000 Syrian-Armenians has left the government few resources to address refugee concerns, and the country remains dependent on international humanitarian and development assistance. Georgia has been affected by large population movements since the 1990s as consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the occupation of two regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.



Although an estimated 147,000 people have returned to their homes in the Gali district (in the Abkhazia region), secured a durable housing solution elsewhere in Georgia, or remained in their original places of residence near the South Ossetia region, approximately 240,000 remain displaced from the 1993 and 2008 wars.

Finally, in Ukraine, fighting between government troops and combined Russian-Separatist forces continues despite the signing of ceasefire agreements in September 2014 and February 2015. Russia's occupation of Crimea, which is part of Ukraine, and the fighting in parts of eastern Ukraine have resulted in nearly two million people having been displaced from their homes, including over 1.2 million registered IDPs and over 777,000 refugees and asylum seekers in neighboring countries. Although most IDPs have settled in regions bordering the conflict zone, they are increasingly settling in more remote areas of the country as host communities reach absorption capacity. Integration opportunities for refugees are increasingly limited for displaced individuals as displacement increases and needs outstrip the response capacity of local governments and community groups.

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In 2015, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and other persons of concern in Latin America and the Caribbean approached seven million. The ongoing conflict in Colombia generates the largest numbers of refugees and IDPs in the region, and the second largest worldwide. The Government of Colombia (GOC) reports 6 million IDPs as of February 2015. Despite an expanded state presence and improved security in cities and towns throughout Colombia, displacement continues. In 2014 the GOC registered 150,317 newly displaced individuals as a result of confrontations between the GOC and illegal armed groups, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), criminal gangs (BACRIM) and criminal narco-trafficking networks. According to UNHCR, it is likely that displacement will continue.

In surrounding countries, including Ecuador, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Panama, there are over 400,000 Colombian asylum seekers and refugees and the number continues to rise. Ecuador has the highest number of recognized Colombian refugees and asylum seekers in Latin America. As of December 2013, the Government of Ecuador (GOE) has recognized 54,865 refugees and UNHCR reports an additional 80,243 persons of concern. The asylum process in Ecuador is slow and difficult to access; and the approval rate is around six percent. The GOE administers the pre-admissibility step in addition to the refugee status determination (RSD) process, which creates additional delays.

Asylum seekers pending RSD can wait up to a year for a decision. UNHCR highlights a challenging protection environment in Ecuador for refugees, citing delays in registration, revocations of refugee status, labor exploitation, xenophobia and discrimination. Other countries in the region, such as Costa Rica, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, also have established asylum procedures, but the registration and determination procedures are often

implemented ineffectively. UNHCR is working with these countries, including Ecuador, to improve their asylum processes.

In Panama, many of the 1,808 recognized refugees and over 15,000 persons of concern are Colombians (as of June 2014). After more than a decade of ineffective handling of the temporary humanitarian protection status holders (PTH) situation, Panama's Office for Assistance to Refugees (ONPAR) delivered permanent resident documentation to most PTH holders in March 2014. As of December 2014, in Costa Rica, there are 12,858 recognized refugees and 9,582 of persons of concern to UNHCR. The recognition rate for asylum applications is approximately 7.5%. Decisions in asylum cases in Costa Rica can take up to a year yet asylum seekers have the right to work while they are waiting for a decision. UNHCR reported in December 2014 that there are 4,340 recognized refugees in Venezuela, and UNHCR estimates there are more than 200,000 persons live in a refugee-like situation in the country. As of mid-2014 in Brazil, there are almost 6,000 recognized refugees from 75 countries; the largest numbers are from Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala face extreme violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, severe economic inequality and social exclusion, and widespread corruption and poverty, compelling many people to flee their homes each year. These factors, including the desire to reunify with family members residing in the United States, contributed to an unprecedented number of unaccompanied children and families with young children arriving in the United States in 2014. In FY 2014 51,700 unaccompanied children and 61,300 individuals in family units from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala were apprehended by United States Border Patrol. This was a sharp increase compared with 4,400 unaccompanied children from these same countries apprehended in FY 2010. In the first half of FY 2015 authorities apprehended 11,200 family units and 9,800 unaccompanied children from these same countries.

## NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

The Near East/South Asia region remains host to more than twelve million refugees, primarily Afghans, Bhutanese, Iranians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Sri Lankans, Tibetans, and Syrians. Few countries in the region are party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol.

Nonetheless, many host governments tolerate the presence of refugees within their borders. UNHCR, ICRC, IOM, WFP, UNRWA, and other humanitarian organizations work with refugees in the region. Some countries have provided long-term protection and/or asylum, mainly to Tibetans, Bhutanese, Sri Lankans, Palestinians, Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, Syrians, and a handful of other nationalities. Refugees identified by UNHCR for third-country resettlement include Iraqis in Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and the Gulf States; Bhutanese in Nepal; Afghans in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Syria, and India; and Iranians in Turkey. In 2014, UNHCR also began to refer several thousand vulnerable Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt to a number of resettlement countries.



As of February 20, 2015, more than 189,000 Iraqi refugees were registered with UNHCR in the region. There is no internationally agreed-upon number of Iraqi refugees and IDPs due to the fact that not all are registered with UNHCR and they are dispersed throughout the region. Prior to the current conflict, UNHCR reported that approximately 950,000 Iraqis remained internally displaced by sectarian violence following the Samarra Mosque bombing of February 2006. IOM reports that over three million Iraqis have been displaced since January 2014 by violence in Iraq. As of February 2015, there are nearly 250,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq, as well as approximately 36,000 refugees and 6,500 asylum seekers of other origins (including Palestinians and Iranian Kurds).

The U.S. government is providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced Iraqis and refugees from Iraq across the region through support to international and non-governmental organizations. U.S. funding seeks to ensure conflict-affected Iraqis receive shelter, water, sanitation, health care, protection, and education. Since the start of Fiscal Year 2014, the U.S. has provided nearly \$478 million in essential humanitarian assistance. Intense fighting in Syria has caused massive displacement, both internally and to countries in the region. Inside Syria, more than 12.2 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance, 7.6 million are internally displaced and 5.6 million children are in need. Nearly five million Syrians are living in areas that are difficult to reach. Some 440,000 people, and perhaps many more, remain besieged predominantly by the regime and the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The regime has long besieged nearly 170,000 civilians in the Damascus suburbs, consistently barring aid agencies from reaching them, including in the Yarmouk neighborhood, which has been besieged for two years.

Outside of Syria, neighboring countries are hosting nearly four million refugees. Hospitals are filled to capacity, schools are running double shifts, the availability of water has decreased, and housing rents are rising in communities hosting Syrians. The crisis has pushed the number of Lebanese living in poverty to 170,000, rising by nearly two-thirds since 2011. Meanwhile, Turkey has spent over \$6 billion to support refugees, through construction and services in high quality camps and other support to non-camp communities.

The U.S. government is providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced Syrians and refugees from Syria across the region through support to international organizations, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, UNFPA, IOM, ICRC, and WFP, as well as through non-governmental organizations, which are providing critical assistance in virtually all sectors, including water and sanitation, shelter, education and medical care. As of July 6, 2015 the U.S. government, the single largest global donor, had provided over \$4 billion in critical humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syria crisis.

Despite the voluntary repatriation of over 5.8 million Afghan refugees since 2002, Pakistan and Iran continue to host, respectively, approximately 1.5 million and 950,000 registered Afghans, many of whom have resided in these countries for decades. The maintenance of asylum and protection space for those refugees who cannot yet return to Afghanistan while continuing to support voluntary repatriation, is a top priority for the U.S. government and for UNHCR.

In addition to Afghan refugees, some 2-3 million Afghans are believed to live and work in Pakistan and Iran as economic migrants without documentation. Over 11,000 Afghan refugees and asylum seekers are also registered with UNHCR in India. Identifying durable solutions remains an important component of UNHCR's strategy in India. Local integration in South Asia remains a difficult option due to opposition from host countries.

Thousands of ethnic Nepali Bhutanese were forced out of Bhutan in the early 1990s as a result of the Bhutanese government's policy of "one nation and one people" (also referred to as "Bhutanization"). Despite 17 rounds of formal negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal, and pressure from the United States and other governments to resolve the issue and secure the right of return for Bhutanese refugees, particularly humanitarian cases, to date none have been permitted to return. Due to concerted resettlement efforts commenced in late 2007 by the United States and other resettlement countries, over 96,000 of the original population of 108,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have departed after spending two decades in camps in eastern Nepal; of which more than 81,000 have resettled in the U.S. The U.S. government continues to press the Government of Bhutan to help resolve this protracted situation by accepting the return of eligible refugees who wish to voluntarily repatriate. Similarly, the U.S. government encourages the Government of Nepal to allow the remaining refugees to work, gain legal status, and access public education, health care, and other services.