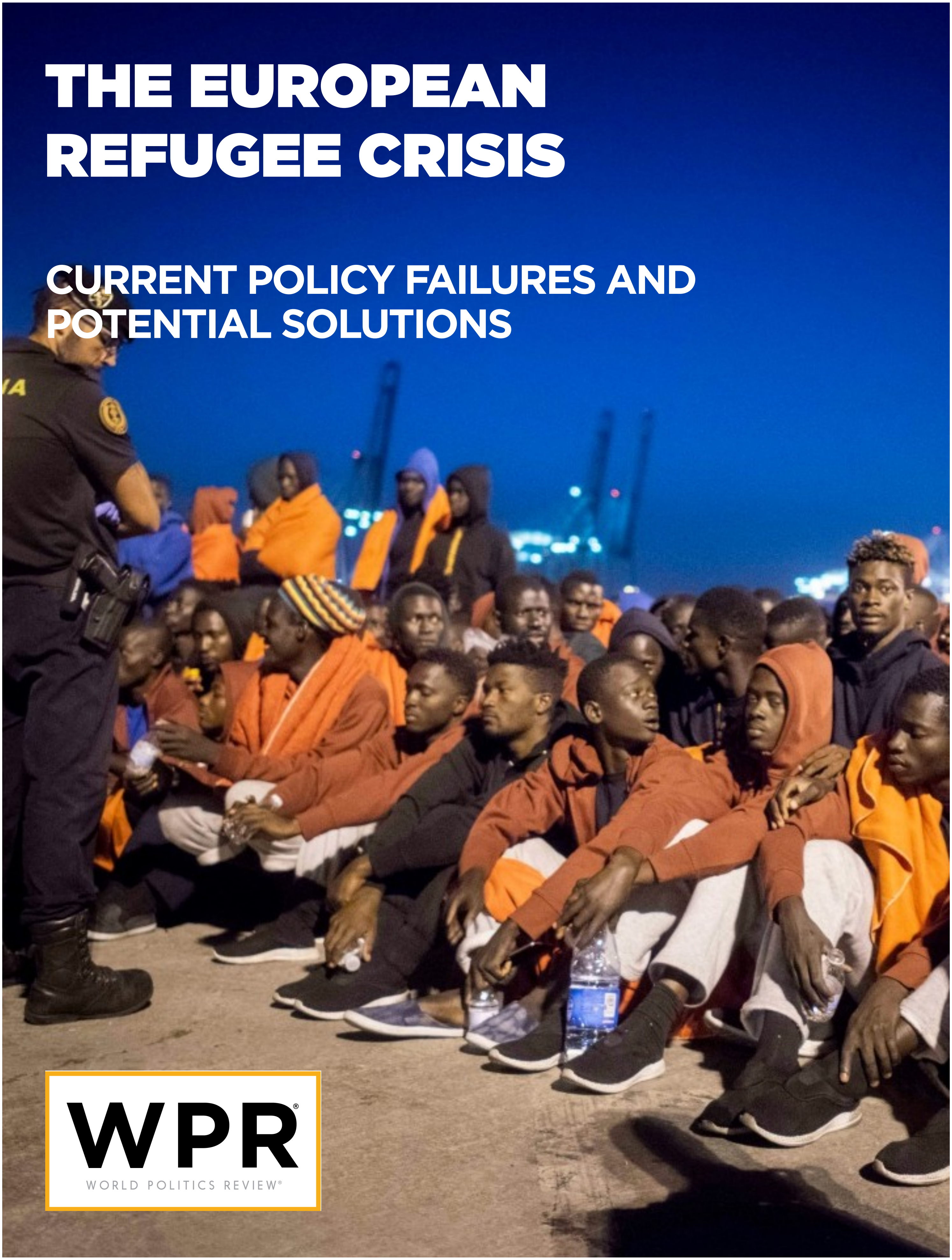
THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS

CURRENT POLICY FAILURES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS



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THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS:

Current policy failures and potential solutions.

A FREE WHITE PAPER

In the wake of the largest European refugee crisis since World War II, the influx of migrants from Africa and the Middle East have had a profound impact across the EU, closing minds and borders. So far, the EU's refugee policy has undermined norms and the EU itself. Tragically, its approach appears doomed to fail, as it ignores the push factors driving people to make the trip. This paper provides a look at the crisis, the response from the EU and several of its constituent countries, and a glimpse at what the future may hold.

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Europe’s Refugee Response Undermines International Norms—and the EU

By Matthew J. Gibney

The last few years have seen the emergence of the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the end of World War II, with almost 1.3 million asylum-seekers arriving in 2015, mostly on boats from Turkey or North Africa. The vast majority have been Syrians fleeing the devastating collapse of their country, though they have been joined by people from Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and a range of other troubled countries. Those seeking protection have arrived in a divided, disorganized and panicked continent. The inadequacy of Europe’s response has jeopardized not only international refugee norms but, in the recent words of French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, “the very idea of Europe” itself.

open the Borders

A refugee child at the northern Greek border station of Idomeni, March 7, 2016 (AP photo by Visar Kryeziu).

Europe has dealt with refugees on a large scale before. Only 20 years ago, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to war in Yugoslavia and, soon after, the conflict in Kosovo, resulting in the internal and external displacement of over 3 million people. The plight of these forced migrants generated limited but effective cooperation among European countries. Temporary asylum was provided until peace returned to the Balkans.

Yet the current situation is even more challenging. More than half the population of Syria is displaced, with several million people scattered across Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, whose commitment to take in Syrian refugees dwarfs Europe's. The numbers arriving in Europe may thus rise in the years ahead, as refugees leave overcrowded camps and squalid conditions in Syria's neighbors. Also fueling current concerns are old worries about the migration of Muslims to Europe, concerns exacerbated by the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. This is a choice moment for those European politicians who see xenophobia as a ticket to electoral victory.

In principle, international law, reinforced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, provides a framework for dealing with this crisis. The 1951 Refugee Convention identifies both which individuals warrant international protection—those with a well-founded fear of persecution—and what the minimal responsibilities of states to such individuals are, above all the duty not to return them to places where they would face persecution. When drafting the convention in 1951, states also explicitly committed themselves to a key principle: They would act together "in a true spirit of cooperation" to provide durable solutions for the plight of refugees. How has Europe's response fared in terms of this framework?

In relation to identifying who needs protection, Europe's response has been mixed at best. On the one hand, there has been a consensus that, given the violent religious and political conflicts that rack Syria, those fleeing the country are refugees according to the convention's terms. Yet this identification has not encouraged states to open up legal routes for Syrians to travel to Europe, nor prevented states, like Denmark, from threatening to seize the assets of refugees who arrive in order to deter incomers.

Despite common institutions, EU states have acted in radically contrasting ways when faced with desperate refugees.

Moreover, the scale of the plight of Syrians has tended to legitimize state practices that turn a deaf ear to the protection claims of people of other nationalities. This is evident in the way some in European media and government refer to the current situation as a "migration crisis," despite the fact that almost all of those arriving are from refugee-producing countries. It is apparent also in the way that Macedonia closed its borders to all but Syrian and Iraqi refugees; in the U.K.'s commitment solely to resettle Syrians—and then only those from refugee camps in the region; and in the fact that the EU's asylum relocation schemes in Greece and Italy are limited only to asylum-seekers from countries whose nationals already have very high refugee acceptance rates. Identifying those who need protection as being only refugees from specific countries risks violating refugee norms, because it ignores the dangers that particular individuals may face.

The question of which country is responsible for providing refugees with asylum has proved even more contentious. While not denying outright the need of refugees for protection, many European states, anxious to avoid new arrivals, have argued that protection should be provided anywhere but on their own doorstep. Some states have argued that those seeking protection should stay in their country of first arrival in Europe, typically Italy or Greece. However, this idea, which is consistent with the European Union's Dublin Convention, has been undermined by the numbers arriving at Europe's border countries.

In response, the EU has provided support for processing asylum-seeker arrivals in Italy and Greece, so-called hot spots. Assistance has also been provided for facilitating the return of asylum seekers without valid claims and through a commitment to resettle some 160,000 refugees throughout Europe. Even with this support, Greece has recently announced that a massive injection of EU aid to house and care for refugees will be necessary in order to avoid a humanitarian disaster in the country.

More troubling is the fact that the idea of keeping Syrian refugees outside of Europe altogether is appealing to many European states. The obvious way to do this is to stop refugees from leaving Turkey for Greece. EU states have reached deals with Turkey to improve conditions there for refugees, by, for example, boosting work opportunities and opening up possibilities for formal resettlement in Europe. Turkey itself has also been offered the prospect of visa-free travel and a generous aid package. In return, the EU wants the country to prevent refugees from leaving to Europe.

The EU hopes to use Turkey as a safe country where those who would otherwise seek asylum in Europe could stay and, potentially, where those who do arrive might be returned. This approach is problematic, legally and morally. Turkey is not a signatory to the full Refugee Convention; it has a dubious history when it comes to human rights protection; and preventing refugees from leaving would seem to violate the right of refugees to seek asylum.

What is perhaps most remarkable is how poorly Europe has fared in exhibiting the "spirit of cooperation" first envisaged by the signatories of the Refugee Convention. Despite common institutions, EU states have acted in radically contrasting ways when faced with desperate refugees. Sweden and Germany have displayed unprecedented levels of openness, while the Visegrad states—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia—have acted in ways ranging from erecting razor-wire fences to selectively processing asylum claims, which raises concerns about refoulement, or forcibly returning refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are likely to be persecuted. The Refugee Convention expressly prohibits sending refugees back to a country where their lives would be threatened. Indeed, the principle of nonrefoulement underpins international human rights law.

The U.K., meanwhile, has unilaterally decided that, apart from a paltry intake of resettled refugees—20,000 conveniently spaced over five years—it is enough to fund refugee camps in the region, even as Italy and Greece cry for help from their European partners.

It is never easy for countries faced with large numbers of refugees and migrants to square the need to provide protection with goals of management and control. But these tasks are virtually impossible without regional cooperation and a spirit of collective solidarity. With

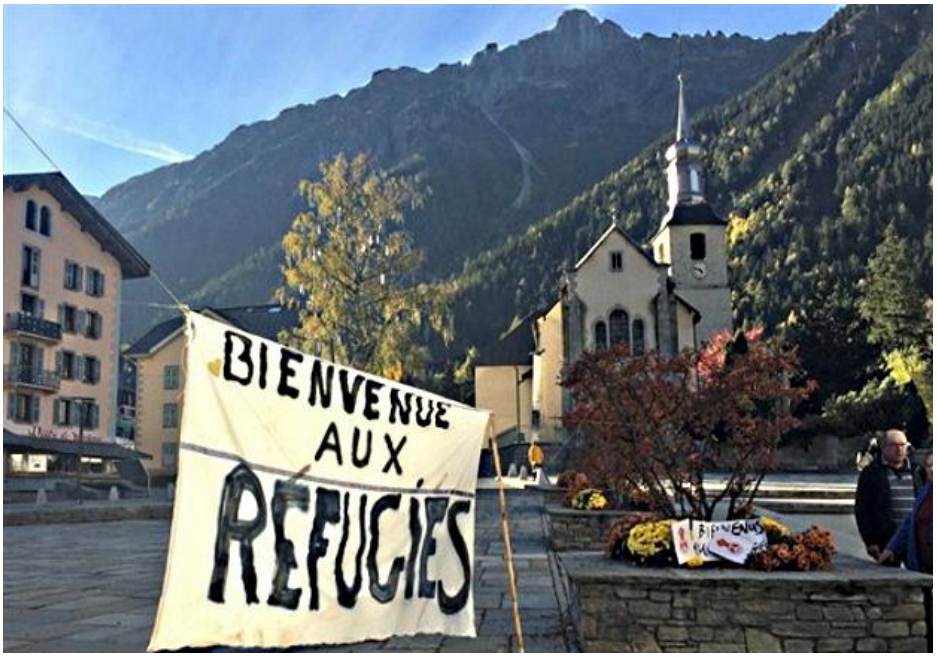
Europe little more coordinated than the movements of the desperate people it currently faces, both refugee protection and the EU are in trouble.

Matthew J. Gibney is professor of politics and forced migration at the University of Oxford; official fellow of Linacre College, Oxford; and deputy director of the Refugee Studies Centre. This story has been updated since its original publish date of March 7, 2016

Disputes Over Migrants Along the Italy-France Border Expose Ongoing EU Policy Gaps

By Vittoria Traverso

In April 2018, authorities in Italy requested a formal investigation of five French border patrol agents in the Alps who entered Italy to perform an unauthorized drug test on a Nigerian citizen, in what the authorities say was a violation of Italian sovereignty. It was just the latest episode in months-long tensions at the French-Italian border near Col de l'Echelle, or Colle Della Scala, a high mountain pass in northwestern Italy that has become a popular route for migrants trying to enter into France.



A banner in a town square in the French Alps reads "Welcome Refugees," Chamonix, France, Oct. 22, 2016 (AP photo by Bertrand Combaldieu).

A month earlier, a volunteer mountain guide on the French side of the border was charged with facilitating illegal immigration after he rescued a migrant woman on the pass; she was nearly nine months pregnant. In another instance, an anti-migrant protest organized by a mainly French far-right group with branches in other countries, including Italy, led to clashes with the Italian police and pro-migrant activists.

Since France re-introduced border checks with Italy in the wake of the refugee and migrant crisis in 2015, migration routes have shifted to more remote areas—initially mountain passages like those in the Roya Valley near the Mediterranean town of Ventimiglia bordering the French Riviera. But in 2018, as those parts of the border became more heavily patrolled, migrants were pushed to find alternative routes that are even more remote, such as Col de l'Echelle, high in the Alps.

A 7-mile trail around Col de l'Echelle connects the Italian town of Bardonecchia with Nevache, a French village just across the border. During winter months, it is covered by heavy snow and temperatures at its summit plunge far below zero at night. Most migrants are not equipped to survive for long in such extreme conditions; many set off for the hike wearing jeans and sneakers.

According to Paolo Narcisi, the president of Rainbow for Africa, an Italian NGO that runs a first aid clinic inside the train station in Bardonecchia, the majority of migrants transiting through the Alpine town are from countries in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan. Many are seeking asylum. As mentioned in the last chapter, under the current Common European Asylum System and related Dublin Regulation, in force since 1997, migrants or refugees must seek asylum in the "country of first arrival"—in this case, Italy—and cannot seek asylum elsewhere for six months. The few men and women who actually manage to cross the dangerous mountain pass are often arrested by French border patrol agents and transported back to Bardonecchia.

As Narcisi explains, at least 15 percent of the people who visit his clinic would have the right to enter France under a Dublin Regulation rule that allows migrants to travel to another European country for family reconciliation. But in most cases, French border patrol agents do not take the time to verify migrants' rights under the EU. "French agents patrol the pass to look for migrants and simply drive them back across the border," Narcisi says. "There is no effort to understand their legal circumstances."

Since the re-introduction of border checks, border patrol is increasingly a matter of national security rather than of EU coordination. As Lina Vosyliute, a researcher at the Center for European Policy Studies, a Brussels-based think tank, explains, law-enforcement agents are under political pressure to deliver on border security. This can often lead to extreme policing that violates migrants' rights.

EU member states have an obligation under the Dublin Regulation to accept migrants who are minors and not accompanied by an adult. But eight NGOs that operate in Ventimiglia, the town near the Roya Valley that has been a hub for migrant passages, filed an official report to the European Commission to denounce the "systematic forgeries" of minors' identification documents by French authorities. Narcisi says this happens in the northern part of the border, too. "They trick people who can't speak French into signing documents that state they are over 18, so they can send them back to Italy.

European law-enforcement agents are under political pressure to deliver on border security, leading to violations of migrants' rights.

This kind of policing can also result in what refugee and migrant advocates call the "criminalization of solidarity." That was the case with Benoit Ducos, the French mountain guide who now faces a five-year prison sentence for aiding a pregnant migrant along the French-Italian border.

According to the Center for European Policy Studies, the lack of a common EU framework on human smuggling is partly to blame. "EU anti-smuggling rules are very vague and provide a large margin of discretion for member states' policies," Vosyliute says. For instance, the EU does not require member states to specifically exempt humanitarian assistance from the range of activities that can be considered "human smuggling," which results in effectively criminalizing some of the aid offered to migrants and refugees.

Both Narcisi and Vosyliute point to the same issue when asked what could improve migrants' safety and ease border tensions. "The introduction of legal pathways to enter EU member countries is the elephant in the room when we speak about these issues," Vosyliute says.

The chances for that to happen in the near future appear slim, though. Bulgaria, the current president of the European Council, is evaluating proposed changes to the Dublin Regulation, including the introduction of a quota system to deal with asylum applications—something that was briefly attempted in 2016 before being called off amid fierce opposition from countries like Hungary and Poland. The newly proposed system would allow for the voluntary relocation of refugees to "willing" countries, which would in part be compensated with financial inducements.

But so-called frontline countries like Italy, Spain, Malta, Greece and Cyprus strongly oppose the proposed change. Instead, they ask for a more "equitable" common asylum policy based on a mandatory redistribution of asylum applicants across the entire EU. Given such polarized stances, it is unlikely that the European Council will find an agreement over a new asylum system before the end of Bulgaria's presidency in June. Austria then takes over, and is unlikely to put the issue at the top of the council's agenda.

Making matters worse, a strict new asylum law in France, could further hamper migrants' rights and increase border tensions between France and Italy, according to Marie-Laure Basilien-Gainche, an expert on migration law at the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3. The law doubles the amount of time that authorities can detain undocumented migrants and makes illegal immigration a criminal offense that could result in a year-long prison sentence, continuing a trend across Europe of national criminal justice measures being used as tools to manage migration.

According to a report by the Center for European Policy Studies, the ideal EU asylum system would include the principle of "mutual recognition of positive decisions." That is, if a migrant is granted refugee status in one EU member country, other EU countries would automatically recognize that status. This way, asylum-seekers would not be stuck in countries like Italy and Greece, but would be able to move legally across borders.

“The Dublin Regulation puts pressure on external member states and was not designed for big numbers of arrivals,” Vosyliute says. “Without a coordinated asylum system, we risk putting into question the very principle of free movement of people in Europe.”

Vittoria Traverso is an Italian journalist based in New York. She holds a master’s in public management from the London School of Economics and a master’s in journalism from Columbia University. This story has been updated since its original publish date of May 31, 2018.

Greece's Far-Right Seizes on the Refugee Crisis to Push its Racist Vision

By Yiannis Baboulias

ATHENS—"Burn them alive!"

In April 2018, the sinister shouts of far-right thugs to migrants and refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos made news all over the world. The thugs had attacked and injured hundreds of refugees camping in the central square of Mytilene, the island's capital. The police didn't intervene. While many hoped it was a one-off, the scenes were repeated again when Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras visited the island. The same far-right groups attacked activists, journalists and even police officers. Again, no arrests were made.

Riot police try to keep protesters away from migrants during clashes at the port of Mytilene, on the Greek island of Lesbos, April 22, 2018 (Eurokinissi photo via AP).

For those following Greek politics, this might sound all too familiar. Since coming to prominence in 2012, when it first entered the Greek parliament, the far-right Golden Dawn party, which is behind these protests, has become the protagonist of many stories of violence and impunity. In 2013, the Greek government was forced to act, after a neo-Nazi member of Golden Dawn murdered an anti-fascist musician in Athens. The party's leadership and dozens of its members were arrested and charged with criminal conspiracy, accused of planning the murder and hundreds of other offenses. The case file runs well over 3,000 pages.

For many Greeks, the arrests meant that Golden Dawn was finished. Since then, many of its members have been convicted, and the ongoing trial threatens to send its leaders to jail. But now, despite its waning popularity, the party is looking to galvanize new supporters by returning to its familiar haunts. Violent attacks against refugees and anti-fascist activists are now an almost daily occurrence in Greece. The ongoing refugee crisis, which is entering a new phase as thousands of people seeking asylum once again travel from Turkey to Greece every month, provides fertile ground for the party to push its violent and racist vision.

After the European Union and Turkey reached a deal in March 2016 to restrict migration to Europe by sending refugees and asylum-seekers trying to reach Greece back to Turkey, the crisis was supposed to be under control. As part of the deal, people who made it to Greece, usually by crossing the Aegean, were confined to camps on five islands, including Lesbos, while their asylum claims were processed. Yet according to volunteers and activists, the picture today in Greece not only reflects a failure to deal with the pre-existing situation—in the two months before the 2016 deal, 46,000 refugees had arrived on Lesbos—but ever-worsening conditions across the islands of the eastern Aegean.

The Moria refugee camp on Lesbos is the island's largest. Run by the Greek government, it was built to hold 2,500 people, at most. As Doctors Without Borders reported in May 2018, more than 7,000 people are currently packed into the camp. "The living conditions and the reduction in the provision of medical care endanger the health and the lives of people trapped there," the organization warned. Overall, more than 15,000 migrants and refugees are now being held on the five designated Greek islands whose camps have a capacity for just over 6,000 people.

Golden Dawn is looking to take advantage of the situation. During a visit to Lesbos, Tsipras promised to ramp up the state's efforts to relieve the island and others nearby "swiftly and decisively," and "to offer citizens the feeling of safety they are entitled to." But after many months of waiting, and with the far right using the ordeal to promote its own agenda and stoke a backlash against refugees, these promises sound empty.

Violent attacks against refugees and anti-fascist activists are now an almost daily occurrence in Greece.

Staff at the Moria camp has repeatedly raised the alarm about worsening conditions there, including "a dramatic deterioration of the health and mental health situation," as they told Doctors Without Borders. "The authorities have not responded to meet this very clear and present need, and the suffering of the population continues to increase," said one nurse in the camp. "Every day in our clinic, we see patients with urgent needs, including many cases of suicide attempts and self-harm. We urge the Greek government to stop this inhumane and unsustainable policy of containment on the islands and immediately increase the provision of medical care for these families."

Violence against refugees unfortunately is not limited to the Greek islands. Separate attacks were also recorded in Eleonas camp near Athens. Similar incidents are taking place all over Greece as Golden Dawn ramps up its extremist rhetoric.

In the northern region of Evros, thousands of people are entering Greece by trekking across the dangerous Evros River that marks the border with Turkey. In April 2018, some 3,000 people crossed at Evros—half the estimated arrivals for all of 2017, according to the United Nations refugee agency.

Patrolling that border area has become harder than usual because of worsening relations between Greece and Turkey. In what looks like an attempt to blackmail Greece, which refuses to extradite eight Turkish military officers who sought asylum there after 2016's failed coup, two Greek soldiers in Evros who accidentally crossed into Turkey in March 2018 were arrested and might now be charged with espionage. In the past, this would normally be a routine incident, as the border is not always visible in bad weather. But now it has added to a brewing geopolitical crisis.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government have ramped up their aggressive rhetoric against Greece, especially around the divided island of Cyprus, where natural gas projects are about to start. They have also continued Turkey's long-term strategy of disputing maritime borders in the Aegean. Violations of Greece's airspace and territorial waters by Turkish jets and vessels have quadrupled in comparison to previous years, with more than 5,000 incidents in 2017. Ahead of snap elections in Turkey, Erdogan and his party's officials are criticizing Greece at every turn. The head of the largest opposition party, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, even says Turkey needs to reclaim 18 islands in the Aegean "occupied by Greece."

Further deterioration in ties between Athens and Ankara could unravel the 2016 deal to contain refugees and migrants in Turkey—an agreement Erdogan has already threatened to scrap as his relations with Europe have soured. He made the agreement in exchange for EU promises of aid, visa-free travel for Turks and accelerated EU membership talks. Meanwhile, a new law introduced by the Assad regime in Syria aims to confiscate the property of people who have fled the country, and is almost certain to push many of the millions of Syrians currently staying in Turkey to seek their future in Europe.

The EU and Greece appear delusional in their hope that a few islands in the Aegean could become choke points for the flow of desperate refugees making the journey to Europe. On the ground, there is little evidence to suggest the situation won't soon revert back to the worst days of 2015.

Yiannis Baboulias is a writer and analyst based in Athens. His work has appeared in Al Jazeera English, Foreign Policy, The New Statesman, The Observer, Politico, The London Review of Books and more. This story has been updated since its original publish date of May 15, 2018.

Why Once-Welcoming Countries in Scandinavia Closed Their Borders to Refugees

By Rik Rutten

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—For decades, Swedes have taken pride in providing a safe haven to the world's huddled masses. Their country took in 163,000 refugees in 2015 alone. That equaled about 1.6 percent of Sweden's population, an intake of refugees far higher than most of Europe, both in absolute terms and per capita. But times have changed.

WHERE ARE
THE HUMAN RIGHTS
IN DENMARK?
15 B

Syrian refugees seeking asylum hold banners outside the Swedish Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark, Sept. 26, 2012 (AP Photo by Jens Dresling).

Unlike new arrivals who were often previously awarded permanent residency, the vast majority of asylum-seekers who have arrived since November 2015 are only eligible for a temporary permit to stay in Sweden. The government stated at the time of this policy shift that it aimed "to temporarily adjust the asylum regulations to the minimum level in the EU so that more people choose to seek asylum in other EU countries." As a result, bringing families of migrants and refugees into Sweden has become much harder. With its tougher laws, Sweden now finds itself at the bottom of the European Union when it comes to welcoming refugees.

Putting this new policy in practice has brought back measures that were thought to be a thing of the past. Jan. 4, 2017 marked a year since the government shut the Swedish-Danish border. Crossing the bridge over the Oresund Strait between both countries, a daily commute for many, is now subject to passport checks. For the first time in half a century, photo identification is required for all entrants from Denmark.

Part of the story behind this sea change is pure logistics. Like Canada, Sweden has long had a friendly immigration attitude because of its place on the map. Even with generous permits and benefits, limited numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers would make their way up to this cold, northern country, far away from the hotspots of migration. That was true until the exodus of refugees from Syria's civil war. Those who made their way to Europe often headed directly for Sweden, attracted by the generous permit policy and the presence of friends and relatives who had come before them. At its peak, so many refugees arrived in the southern city of Malmo that some were left to sleep outside.

Even in generous Sweden, pragmatism quickly overtook idealism. "The government now repeats that while it wants to take its responsibility [toward refugees] seriously, it never wants to go back to the situation of the autumn of 2015," says Lisa Pelling, chief analyst and migration expert at Arena Ide, a progressive Swedish think tank, referring to the height of refugee arrivals in the country.

The challenges go beyond the short-term concerns of registration and finding temporary accommodation. The Swedish labor market is hard to access, particularly for low-skilled workers, and finding a place to live is notoriously difficult—over 80 percent of municipalities face housing shortages.

Logistics matter, but Sweden's U-turn on refugees is as much a political story as a practical one. As the scope of the refugee crisis became visible, the governing coalition of Social Democrats and

Greens saw its popularity rapidly decline. Benefiting from all this were the Sweden Democrats, an anti-establishment and far-right nationalist party that at the height of the crisis in 2015 vied for first place in public opinion polls. If diverting refugees was the official motive behind the asylum policy overhaul, diverting support for the Sweden Democrats was the subtext.

"The government has tried playing the cards of the Sweden Democrats and racing them to the bottom," says Pelling. "But it discovered that there is no bottom." Indeed, the Sweden Democrats have argued that the new law still does not go far enough. But the policy change did bring the government what it had hoped for: popular support. An opinion poll in March 2016 found that two-thirds of Swedes supported the new, tightened asylum policy. Meanwhile, public support for the Sweden Democrats has declined.

"The government has tried playing the cards of the Sweden Democrats and racing them to the bottom. But it discovered that there is no bottom."

Whereas Sweden was caught by surprise by the refugee crisis, neighboring Denmark was more prepared to adopt a harsh new position on immigration. "The Danish political establishment has pointed to Sweden as an example of what happens if you do not have restrictive policies," says Zachary Whyte, a migration and integration researcher at the University of Aalborg. Already in 2002, the Danish government had introduced laws that made partner migration subject to strict rules and denied full access to citizenship and benefits to foreigners for their first seven years in the country; laws were further tightened in 2011. Still, Denmark's newer asylum policies have been blunt enough to cause international controversy, especially when a law was approved in January 2016 to seize assets, including jewelry, from refugees entering the country. But in generating such attention, the laws worked exactly as intended.

As the Danish government talked up the nation's generosity in media interviews, Whyte recalls, it placed advertisements in Lebanese newspapers to discourage refugees from making the journey to Denmark. The jewelry law illustrated the same attitude: There has been only one report of its use, but it likely generated enough bad press to deter would-be newcomers.

Like in Sweden, Danish politics have been the driving force behind these restrictive measures. In elections in June 2015, the anti-immigration Danish People's Party (DPP) doubled its share of votes to become the second-largest party in parliament. Having campaigned on a platform of limiting migration and preserving the welfare state, it gained a following outside the big cities, where economic growth has been slow and where government assistance has receded. Since the parliamentary elections, the DPP has given crucial backing to a center-right minority government led by Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen. For the DPP, which has backed Cabinets before—including the one that drastically tightened asylum laws in 2002—but never delivered a single minister, this mode of government allows it to yield influence while keeping up its anti-establishment image.

For Denmark's traditional parties, that may yet turn out to be a blessing in disguise. With no rivals from the DPP in executive positions, hardliners within Rasmussen's Venstre Party, like Inger Stojberg, the immigration and integration minister, have been able to steal the spotlight. "Why vote for the People's Party if you can get what you want done through Venstre?" asks Whyte. Most damaging for the DPP, however, was a scandal over the party's misuse of EU funds that embodied all the establishment politics that the party claims it is fighting against.

Denmark and Sweden reflect a trend of far-right and nationalist parties in and around Scandinavia. Norway's Progress Party and Finland's True Finns joined governments following their countries' most recent elections, in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Both parties took advantage of public backlash over immigration, although both parties have lost popularity since then. Like the DPP and the Sweden Democrats, they face the dilemma of taking on the establishment without becoming part of it.

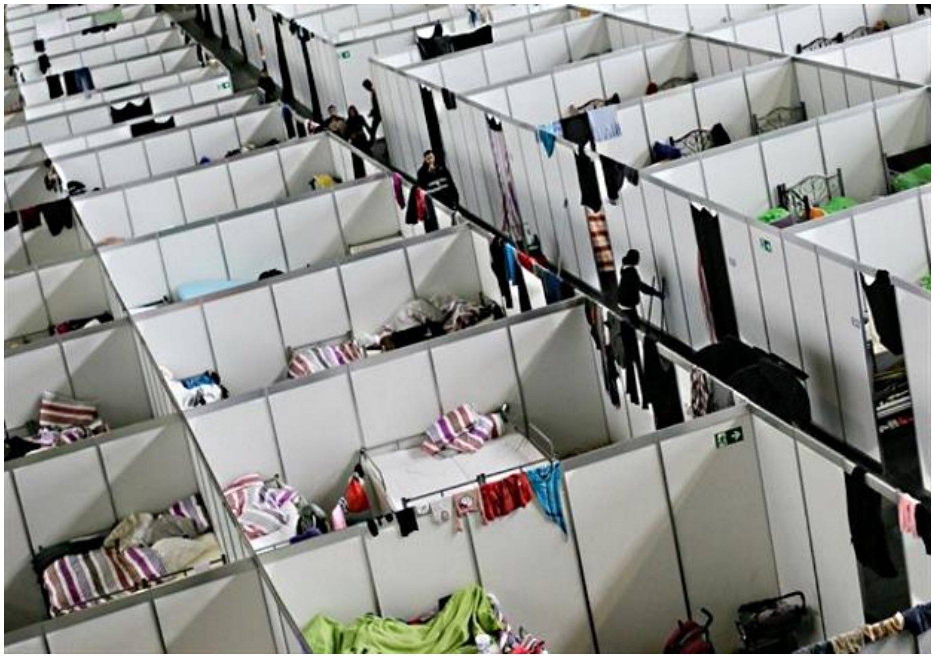
In turn, the region's traditional parties are torn between ignoring their more radical rivals at the risk of losing elections and fending them off by accepting their anti-immigrant narrative. Whatever political choice prevails, the prospect for refugees seems clear: Scandinavia's days of generosity are over.

Rik Rutten is a Dutch journalist based in Sweden. His work has appeared in Dutch and Belgian publications such as De Correspondent, De Groene Amsterdammer and MO. This story has been updated since its original publish date of Jan. 4, 2017.

Germany's Asylum-Seekers are Caught Between Isolation and Integration

By Josie Le Blond

BERLIN, Germany—A few years beyond a historic wave of migration to Germany, a myriad of challenges remain. And the stakes are high, not only for Angela Merkel's increasingly unpopular chancellorship. In July 2016, the first Islamist-inspired attacks by asylum-seekers on German soil trained an international spotlight on the country's efforts to integrate more than a million new arrivals.



Cabins inside a hangar are used as a temporary emergency shelter for asylum-seekers, Berlin, Germany, Dec. 9, 2015 (AP photo by Markus Schreiber).

The chaotic scenes of 2015, which saw hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers and migrants cross German borders within a few months, have long since given way to a more sober approach. Responding to a perceived shift in public mood after foreigners attacked women in Cologne on New Year's Eve, Merkel's government tightened asylum laws and largely regained control over the numbers of incoming migrants.

But now the real work is beginning. In many sectors, the herculean task of integrating so many, so fast, is only just hitting home. The latest solution, a so-called integration law, requires asylum-seekers to assimilate or face the consequences. One of its more controversial measures forces newcomers to learn German and attend mandatory integration courses, or risk having their benefit payments cut.

In return, the government says it will improve asylum-seekers' access to work, training and education, helping the top tier of well-educated self-starters to become a boon to the German economy. A lucky few—typically determined, bright, young and socially connected—are already busy building new lives. But that's just one part of the picture.

In one shocking week in July 2016, an attack on train passengers in Wurzburg and a botched suicide bombing outside a music festival in Ansbach once again electrified public opinion. Both attackers were asylum-seekers previously unknown to authorities, stoking fears that radicalized killers could be hiding among the new arrivals.

Both of these archetypal extremes, the bright sparks and the black sheep, now have Germany's undivided attention. Yet it's the silent, often-forgotten mass in the middle that must be brought on board if Merkel's mantra, "Wir schaffen das," or "Yes we can," is to be remembered as anything more than a mortifying historic blunder.

Much has been written about the growth of Germany's populist, anti-immigrant, far right and the threat it poses to Merkel's power base. With the 2017 national elections looming, politicians scrambled to address voter perceptions that they lost control. But while leaders wrangled over irrelevancies—burka bans or whether pork belongs in school canteens—more than half a million asylum-seekers languished in legal limbo, doing nothing but waiting on the results of their asylum claims.

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Thousands take part in a demonstration against immigration and asylum abuse, Erfurt, Germany, Oct. 7, 2015 (AP photo by Jens Meyer).

FROM WAR TO ISOLATION

For the unluckiest among them, those still kicking around in airport hangars or converted sports gymnasiums, integration is just another buzzword. Asylum-seekers stuck in emergency shelters say their visions of a new and better life in Germany are fading fast. In the worst cases, they feel they have been left to rot.

"We fled death to come here, but we're dead here too," said 27-year-old Syrian doctor Mesud, gesturing downward from a viewing platform at the repurposed Berlin gymnasium he's called home for months. "We have no hope, no future. The things I've experienced here, they've broken me. Before I came here I wanted to integrate, I wanted to learn German. But now I don't have any strength left for that."

Mesud's bed is lined up alongside 170 others on what was once a basketball court. Another hundred people live in a similar arrangement on the floor above. They fled Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Men, women and children live side-by-side on the stacked bunk beds, the sick and the elderly next to heavily pregnant women and mothers nursing newborn babies. Illnesses spread like wildfire, particularly among the children.

While leaders wrangle over irrelevancies—burka bans or whether pork belongs in school canteens—more than half a million asylum-seekers languish in legal limbo.

In desperation, the asylum-seekers have pinned donated bed sheets around the bunk beds, creating makeshift partitions to give the tiniest illusion of privacy. The 270 inhabitants share eight toilets and three showers among them. They rely on sporadic donations for everything, from clothes and shoes to toothpaste, diapers, razors and deodorant.

"Life here is humiliating. We can't integrate like this. We've all been traumatized by this place," says Mohammed, 20, a Syrian student who arrived at the shelter many months ago. "We're trapped. We've been forgotten. We came here because Germany opened the door to us. But then they locked us up. We were once self-sufficient, independent people. We don't deserve this. Living here, our dreams have shrunken. Our goal is just to get out of here and have a simple, normal life."

No one in the makeshift shelter has any idea when they will get out. Constant rumors that it will shut down have never materialized. The camp operator has indicated the inhabitants will be moved into residential containers in October. But no one here dares believe it. They've heard that four times this year already. The deadlines for closing the makeshift shelter have come and gone, and still they wait.

Mesud, Mohammed and the shelter's other residents have been particularly unlucky. Nationwide, the situation is improving. Falling numbers of incoming new arrivals have allowed authorities to clear two-thirds of the gymnasium shelters and move asylum-seekers into standard accommodations, albeit sometimes only temporary containers.

Yet across Germany, 300 converted gymnasiums like this one remain, a stubborn hangover from last winter's accommodation emergency. Back then, almost all German cities were forced to find makeshift solutions to keep tens of thousands of new arrivals from camping out in the freezing streets.

Berlin's long-term social housing shortage meant the German capital was particularly badly placed to meet demand. In 2015, the city received 79,000 people, over 7 percent of last year's new arrivals. This September, 23,000 were still living in emergency shelters, many in similar conditions to Mesud and Mohammed. Five thousand are in converted gymnasiums, the others in residential containers, in the cavernous hangars of the former Tempelhof airport, or in unused conference centers.

Initial rules stated people could only be kept in emergency shelters for a maximum of three months. But in early 2016, that was extended to six months due to severe delays in preparing alternative accommodation. In badly affected areas, people are waiting even longer. Some, even those with young families, have endured life in Mesud and Mohammed's camp for almost a year.

Mohammed is one of the few here learning German. Others, including Mesud, have been turned away from oversubscribed language and integration courses aimed at giving asylum-seekers an introduction to German norms and culture. Demand is overwhelming, with authorities estimating a shortfall of 200,000 places nationwide, mainly due to a lack of qualified teachers. Measures to address this by raising teachers' pay have been slow to take effect.

Even if Mesud were to register for a course, there's nowhere at the shelter for him to study. Life here is miserable, dirty, noisy and boring. Until he receives a decision on his asylum claim, he cannot work, enroll at a university, or embark on an equally tricky search for private accommodations. In these circumstances, there's little for him to do but wait for a letter calling him to an asylum interview.

The German migration agency, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) says the average wait for a final decision on an asylum claim is currently six months. At that crushingly slow pace, frustration can harden into mistrust, even paranoia. "We don't trust them, and they don't trust us," said Mohammed, who has already waited nearly eight months just for a letter calling him to a hearing.

"What if we don't get our mail?" he said. "It gets lost all the time. One guy living here received his interview appointment a week too late. He waited 10 months, then missed his chance. Then, when he went to the office to try and get another date, there was no one to talk to. He waited five hours, and they just said, 'Go home.'"

THE HUMAN COST OF POLICY FAILURE

Given the scale of this year's paperwork tsunami, Mohammed's unhappy wait, however regrettable, is hardly surprising. Germany received a record 564,500 new asylum applications in the first eight months of 2016. That's considerably more than the total number received in the entire decade between 2002 and 2012. As a result, Mohammed's case is now one of an eye-watering backlog of 527,000 open asylum claims nationwide.

"We're trapped. We've been forgotten. We came here because Germany opened the door to us. But then they locked us up."

Germany's daily arrivals have slowed to a trickle since the European Union sealed its "one in, one out" deal with Turkey and Balkan states fenced off the previously well-worn migrant route north. In July, 16,000 asylum-seekers arrived in Germany, compared with a staggering 206,000 in November 2015. But not all those who registered applied for asylum right away, leading to a delayed spike in applications in the first half of this year.

Germany's migration agency was hopelessly underprepared for the sudden influx and subsequent mammoth increase in its workload. In February 2016, BAMF Chairman Frank-Jurgen Weise announced he would more than double both his staff and the number of decisions the office makes on a daily basis.

One acceleration strategy has been to prioritize open-and-shut cases. In March 2016, new rules put those with very good or very bad prospects at the front of the queue. Syrian and Eritrean applicants would be seen first, as well as those to be sent back to an extended list of "safe countries of origin," including the Balkan states, Ghana and Senegal. Somewhere in the middle, asylum-seekers from Afghanistan—all 100,000 of them—face the longest wait.

With pressure ramping up and decisions being made more hastily, critics say pitfalls lurk for asylum-seekers at the interview stage of the procedure. Overworked officials and a lack of qualified interpreters make mistakes more likely. Meanwhile, few asylum-seekers are properly geared up for what is in fact a crucial, make-or-break meeting.

"By the time they get the interview date, most newcomers have tried to forget the worst of what they went through," says Christiane Beckmann, one of the heads of Berlin-based volunteer group Moabit Hilft, who spends hours every week preparing asylum-seekers for their interviews.

"They don't want to talk about rape or violence," she adds. "A lot of them don't understand. They think it's enough to say, 'I've fled the war, like we all did.' But for the German asylum system, you need to make them understand that you personally were in danger. And it matters. Now whether you can bring your family over depends on which status they give you after your interview."

Family reunification is fast becoming the biggest worry for Syrians, Germany's largest group of newcomers. While close to 100 percent of them will be granted protection in Germany, a growing proportion are no longer recognized as refugees under the Geneva Convention. Rather, they are granted subsidiary protection under EU law.

At first glance, the distinction appears negligible. But in March 2016, Germany suspended the right to bring over family members for those granted subsidiary protection for the next two years. With the clock ticking on countless young Syrians, both in Germany and Syria, who have been separated from their parents, those two years could make a crucial difference.

Migrants wait for further transport after arriving at a train station, Schoenefeld, Berlin, Oct. 30, 2015 (AP photo by Markus Schreiber).

Hala stares out of the kitchen window of her shelter in southeast Berlin, trying to picture her son's face. The 50-year-old Syrian engineer left Ram, 18, in Damascus, traveling to Germany on a humanitarian visa to undergo life-saving treatment for her advanced gastric cancer.

She looks exhausted. Weeks earlier, Hala was discharged from the intensive care unit of Berlin's Charite hospital. There, she endured 13 grueling operations applying concentrated chemotherapy to her stomach, a special procedure currently unavailable in conflict-ridden Syria.

Yet Hala's mind is not on the fight of her life. Every day, when nurses come to feed her through an intravenous tube, she talks to them only of Ram, who is scraping by, surviving in a war zone. "The best medicine for me would be to see my son," says Hala. "I think of him more than myself. All my hope is on my child coming here. The cancer, it's horrible. But a lot of people fight it and win. I have this strength, but I need my son to do it."

But a bitter twist of timing means Hala's chances of seeing her son again could be fading. Ram turned 18. His coming of age was little cause for celebration. Overnight, Hala's son became a potential fighter, fresh prey for recruiters ever hungry for combatants in Syria's vicious civil war.

"In this crazy war, maybe they'll make him fight," says Hala, frantic with worry. "Maybe he'll run out of money. Maybe a bomb will kill him. Every day he's under threat of being dragged into the fighting."

Not only that, but Ram turning 18 means he is now an adult in the eyes of the German Foreign Office and therefore no longer eligible to join his mother in Berlin. Exceptions are made only in cases of exceptional hardship, for example if a relative needs care that can only be provided by family members.

Asylum-seekers stuck in emergency shelters say their visions of a new and better life in Germany are fading fast.

As Hala gears up for her third round of chemotherapy, all her hopes are on the authorities making a humanitarian concession. "To the authorities, it's not enough to say, 'My child will have to fight, he's starving,'" she says. "They don't think that's an emergency. But it's different if doctors say I need somebody to help me get well, to help me relax, to improve my emotional well-being. And all the operations or medication in the world won't help me unless I am emotionally strong."

Armed with a small team of volunteer advisers and a stack of personalized appeals written by Germany's top oncologists, Hala sent her case to the German Embassy in Beirut. Initial signs were good, but then silence fell.

And with each day that passes, her health hangs by a thread. "Now I need some answers, will they let him come or not?" she says. "In my situation, what more do they need to bring me my son? What exactly are they thinking about?"

BREAKING THE BOTTLENECK

The answer, once again, most likely lies with overwhelmed bureaucrats. Two thousand miles away in Beirut, officials at the German Embassy are battling a backlog of 100,000 similar applications, untold misery hidden among the stacks of waiting paper. On the embassy website, a note shoos away anyone wanting to apply for a German visa except in truly exceptional circumstances. Demand is just too high.

This Beirut bottleneck also means an excruciating wait for many of the unaccompanied children who entered Germany as asylum-seekers last year. Most of them are Afghan or Syrian; most of them are male. Thousands are still waiting on their claims or have yet to find the legal guardian they need to even submit one. Others have already been granted subsidiary protection, together with the two-year suspension on family unification. And, just as with Ram in Syria, the clock is ticking: Once they turn 18, their parents can no longer legally join them.

A so-called integration law requires asylum-seekers to assimilate or face the consequences.

"We've got a whole load of young men sitting around in Germany who are going on 18 and are running out of time," says Diana Henniges, who advises young asylum-seekers in Berlin. The two-year suspension is counterintuitive to integration efforts, she adds. Without guardians, young lives are vulnerable to going off the rails. "And now," she adds, "Germany is openly saying that it doesn't want their families to come and join them. It's these kids that end up in the parks selling drugs."

Others believe the move is a deliberate attempt to make Germany a less attractive destination for those fleeing the Syrian war. "They're applying pressure on asylum-seekers to leave Germany again by making them wait two years before their family can join them," says Walid Chahrour, head of the BBZ, a clearinghouse for advice and information for young refugees and migrants in Berlin.

"All Syrians want is to be with their families in safety," he adds. "[The German authorities] have made that so difficult that some people start thinking they have to go back to Syria. Every day someone comes into my office wanting to go home."

Chahrour can't help them on that score. But he is convinced that many will return to Syria once the country calms down. "Syrians are like trees," he says. "You can't uproot them and simply plant them somewhere else."

Back in the stifling tedium of the gymnasium shelter, Mohammed and his elder brother Yasul are among those dreaming of returning home, back to join their parents and younger sister holding out in Damascus.

"We're ready to go back to Syria rather than stay here and live like this," says Mohammed. "Despite the war, despite Assad, or even Islamic State. Back there we were people. We had a house. We could study, work. Sure, it's dangerous. But it would be a life. Here it's no life at all."

Only time will tell whether the Syrians and other newcomers stay in Germany for the long term, forever changing and enriching the face of the country. But one thing is certain. Asylum-seekers' current priorities, their hopes, fears and dreams, are squarely at odds with the national debate about how to integrate them into society.

"Just imagine," says Christiane Beckmann of Moabit Hilft. "You're living in a [gymnasium]. You're scared for your family's safety. You wait for your interview, terrified you'll be banned from seeing your kids for another two years. When you go to sleep, you hear the screams, see the bombs falling. And then people moan on about how you don't learn German. You don't have the mental capacity for it. People have no idea."

Access to adequate, appropriate accommodation, an escape from endless, aimless limbo, and the relief of knowing loved ones are safe—these are the priorities of Germany's newcomers. Unless or until these needs are met, very few can morph into the bright, happy, assimilated German-speakers that the recent revised integration rules seek to promote.

Josie Le Blond is a freelance journalist based in Berlin. This story has been updated since its original publish date of Oct. 4, 2016.

Why the EU’s Approach to Curbing Migration is Doomed to Fail

By Vicki Squire

As people continue to migrate—and die—by crossing the Mediterranean Sea by boat, it is time to reflect on what has gone wrong with the 2015 European Agenda on Migration. The agenda purports to be a comprehensive, multidimensional framework designed to address the crisis of increased precarious migration to Europe and associated fatalities at sea. It has led to the development and implementation of policies across a range of priority areas. Yet without taking into account the journeys and experiences of the actual people making their way to Europe—by choice or necessity—European policies will continue to fail, and thousands more will perish while pursuing safety.

Migrants and refugees stand on the deck of a vessel after being rescued by Spanish NGO workers on the Mediterranean Sea, June 16, 2017 (AP photo by Emilio Morenatti).

The Mediterranean Sea is by no means a new site of migratory passage, but it has certainly become one of particular prominence in recent years. Heightened numbers of sea arrivals to the European Union were recorded in 2011 from Tunisia and other countries associated with the so-called Arab Spring. A temporary drop was then followed by an increase in 2014, with a peak of over 1 million sea arrivals to the European Union recorded in 2015. The number of sea arrivals subsequently dropped off in 2016 and 2017, but remained high compared to those arriving prior to 2011. Meanwhile, fatalities at sea have increased year-by-year since 2014, with the highest recorded total of lives lost standing at over 5,000 in 2016. For many, the migration crisis at Europe's shores thus remains a pressing concern.

The spike in 2015 in particular reflected a high proportion of arrivals to Greece, many of them fleeing the conflict in Syria, in a context where routes through the EU were temporarily opened to refugees. However, the Mediterranean migration crisis encapsulates a much broader range of migratory journeys than those from Syria alone.

Migration across the eastern Mediterranean route via Turkey and the Aegean Sea is also a product of ongoing conflicts and tensions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere. And violent conflicts aren't the only reason people attempt the journey to Europe's shores. Many flee unsustainable living conditions, ranging from climate-related displacement and economic hardship to political persecution and family conflict. Migration has many drivers, and arrivals via different routes often have different backgrounds. With such a diversity of experiences and trajectories, it is no wonder that the EU has faced significant challenges in attempting to manage migration.

A EUROPEAN AGENDA ON MIGRATION

In the context of these complex migratory dynamics and increasing deaths at sea, the EU formulated the 2015 European Agenda on Migration, which included a range of actions under four pillars. That multifaceted approach is designed to reduce the incentives for irregular migration; save lives and secure external borders; implement a strong, common asylum policy; and develop a new policy on legal migration. The agenda advances a series of short- and medium-term measures that aim to "build up a coherent and comprehensive framework to reap the benefits and address the challenges deriving from migration." In so doing, it also seeks to respond to the "immediate imperative" to "protect those in need."

Without taking into account the journeys and experiences of the actual people making their way to Europe—by choice or necessity—European policies will continue to fail, and thousands more will perish while pursuing safety.

Three implementation packages in 2015 built on some of the key actions listed in the agenda. These include a European relocation scheme and an EU Action Plan on Migrant Smuggling as part of a first package announced in May 2015. A second package announced an extended relocation program, an Action Plan on Return, and the creation of Trust Funds for Africa and for Syria. A third implementation package outlined a series of actions toward revising European border security through anti-smuggling operations across the Mediterranean, including regular progress reports on reforms.

The European Agenda implementation packages aren't the bloc's only recent policy attempt to address the migration crisis. Developments in 2016 included a series of EU-Turkey Joint Actions, such as a highly publicized March 2016 agreement whereby all irregular arrivals to the EU from Turkey would be returned; for every Syrian returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another would be resettled from Turkey to an EU country, based on the U.N. Vulnerability Criteria.

The EU also initiated a series of Third Country Partnerships or "compacts" with priority states such as Niger, Nigeria and Mali in an attempt to address the "root causes" of migration, from conflict to economic hardship. This coincided with the pursuit of a "hotspot approach" to expedite the processing of arrivals at key entry points, notably Greece and Italy, by a new European Border and Coast

Guard; the extension of the EU's naval border security mission, Operation Sophia; and proposed revisions of the Common European Asylum System and associated Dublin regulations in order to harmonize policies across the EU and determine responsibility for asylum processing.

The European Agenda on Migration has thus been an important catalyst for an extensive range of policy initiatives at the EU level. Though the policy framework that the agenda advances is not radically new, it can be seen as both a starting point and a continuation of activities that have gained momentum over time. Nevertheless, criticisms have been raised about the EU's continued pursuit of a deterrent approach in a context marked by increasing deaths at sea, as well as about restrictions on the rights of individuals seeking entry to the EU that have coincided with the implementation of the European Agenda.

Given the speed at which the agenda and associated EU policies have been put into place since the height of the crisis in 2015, there is an urgent need to assess recent policy developments, taking into account the experiences of the people seeking better conditions or fleeing violence whose livelihoods—and lives—are at stake.

CROSSING THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA BY BOAT

To do so, scholars from the University of Warwick, University of Malta and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy launched a collaborative research project, Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat. The project is unique in that it focuses directly on the impact EU policies have on actual people, drawing together policy analysis and observational fieldwork with in-depth assessments of qualitative interview data from the individuals making—or contemplating making—the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea. In so doing, the project provides previously unconsidered insights into the effects of EU policy on the journeys, experiences, understandings, expectations, concerns and demands of people making the dangerous maritime journey to Europe—insights that EU policymaking has to date overlooked.

Our research is based on 257 in-depth interviews with 271 such individuals, conducted in two phases: The first, which took place from September to November 2015, involved 136 interviews with a total of 139 participants at three island arrival sites—Kos, Malta and Sicily—and subsequently in Malta between December 2015 and March 2016. The second phase, which took place from May to July 2016, involved 121 interviews with a total of 132 participants at four urban sites: Athens, Berlin, Istanbul and Rome.

There is an urgent need to assess recent policy developments on migration, taking into account the experiences of the people seeking better conditions or fleeing violence whose livelihoods—and lives—are at stake.

By giving voice to the people making the perilous journey by boat, the project produces timely and robust criteria for assessing policy developments associated with the 2015 agenda. It considers the impact of policy interventions on migratory experiences across the Mediterranean and the way individuals attempting to reach Europe negotiate complex and entwined migratory and regulatory dynamics. Finally, it asks how a European policy agenda could be reshaped to more effectively address concerns such as deaths at sea.

Critically, Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat highlights the importance of taking into account personal testimonies and demands in the formation and implementation of policy initiatives. To date, such insights have been largely ignored.

THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF DETERRENCE

The European Agenda on Migration has been an important framework for developing a comprehensive and multidimensional response to a complex and pressing challenge. However, the agenda addresses migration through a framework of deterrence, which is designed to prevent people from arriving in the EU in the first place, rather than to address the drivers of migration directly. This deterrent approach is by no means new, and it has already failed—not least in the emergence and escalation of the crisis that led to the agenda in the first place.

Deterrence is based on the assumption that migration to the EU can be prevented through policies that reduce the incentives to migrate or, on arrival, deter individuals that do not gain entry from making future journeys. The hotspot approach is critical in this regard, as a mechanism of detention oriented toward facilitating returns. In a number of cases, the EU has partnered with countries from which migration originates or their neighbors to keep people "at home" or to create barriers to migration en route. For example, search and rescue operations in the Sahara desert are ostensibly meant to save lives, but they also deter onward movement in an attempt to prevent migration "upstream."

However, our research indicates that deterrence doesn't work—and won't work. This is the case, most notably, because many of the people we spoke to didn't necessarily plan to come to the EU in the first place. Rather, the decision to cross the Mediterranean often grew out of a chain of events that weren't necessarily in the control of the individual making the journey to Europe. As one man from Cote d'Ivoire told us when we spoke to him in Sicily:

> My idea was not to reach Italy. I didn't know Italy if not for the football. I never thought to come in Europe, because here I have not family. My family is only in Ivory Coast and Burkina. But is my family who pushed me to go to Mali. In Mali there was a war, then I moved to Algeria, otherwise I would have stayed there. I wasn't lucky enough to stay in Algeria, if not I would have to stay there. I didn't want to go in Libya, the situation is too crazy to go there [A]ll these circumstances pushed me to reach here.

What's more, some people arrived in the EU unknowingly or even against their wishes. As a man from Ghana whom we spoke to in Rome explains, he requested money from the person managing his funds to send to his children back home, only to find himself on a boat to Europe:

> I told him that I need only 3,000 euros to send it for my kids, he told me ok no problem I trust this man so much that I never think any bad intention about this man, I know he cannot do any bad against me Idon't know, we just entered, like, a bush Before I realise they tied me down, took me, there is nothing I

> can do: only me, four, five people or six people Then they just throw me I can hear some sound of sea, the breeze of the sea.

Moreover, our research participants overwhelmingly emphasize the need to migrate from place to place in search of sustainable living conditions that they couldn't find elsewhere. As a woman from Cameroon whom we interviewed in Rome explains:

> It is because of insecurity in our countries that there are many illegal refugees [sic] coming into Europe. Total insecurity is pushing us to migrate. I only want to live in security, I live in fear.

Deterrence simply doesn't work for these people and others who never planned to come to Europe. A significant number arrive in EU countries not because of their desire to reach "destination Europe," but because they are forced to flee, whether from their home countries or from intermediate stops along their migratory route. The individuals we interviewed sent a very clear and powerful message that simply cannot be ignored: that deterrence policy initiatives are not working, are not likely to work, and are currently set to fail.

THE LIMITS OF BLIND ANTI-SMUGGLING EFFORTS

The rising number of people seeking pathways to safety has fueled criminal networks of human smugglers that treat the most vulnerable as goods from which they can profit. Accordingly, the EU agenda emphasizes anti-smuggling initiatives, building on the 2010-2015 EU action plan on migrant smuggling. That earlier plan focused on cooperation with third countries through actions designed to enhance police and judicial responses to the exploitation of migrants in precarious situations.

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European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini speaks during a media conference on migration, Brussels, May 13, 2015 (AP photo by Virginia Mayo).

The 2015-2020 EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling focuses both on returning migrants who have "no right to stay" and on finding "safe, legal ways into the EU" for those who qualify for entry as students or workers. The plan projects an interagency response based on operational collaboration; punitive measures, such as the destruction of smuggling vessels and the confiscation of smugglers' profits; and efforts to share information, assist the vulnerable and build links with third countries. Nevertheless, our research points to the EU's limited understanding of smuggling networks, of the factors—including a lack of alternative routes to Europe—that fuel the market for smuggling, and of the risks people face when they are compelled to make journeys in such a context.

Anti-smuggling initiatives rely on EU officials' limited understanding of the relationships between people seeking to migrate and those facilitating migration. While the EU's emphasis on "ruthless" smuggling networks is in many cases accurate, in numerous others it is not. Some people whom we spoke to said that family members, friends, or friends of friends had helped them onward in their journeys. The stories told during our interviews point to the diversity of experiences with human smuggling. One man whom we interviewed in Sicily spoke of "good guys" who helped him escape the violence of a conflict zone for free, even if others charged him for their services. Another described smugglers as friends:

> "A smuggler it's not somebody from outer space it's a friend, a fellow Somali, an extended cousin, somebody know by a friend of a friend of a friend, it's somebody who does that for a living, but it's a human being."

Far from a straightforward or monolithic picture in which people migrating from or fleeing their home countries are abused by ruthless smugglers, the testimonies of our research participants indicate that anti-smuggling initiatives face a much more complex and challenging situation, in which people are driven to use smuggling networks in the absence of alternative routes to safety.

Reflecting on what EU policymakers could do to provide such alternative routes, one of our research participants in Kos suggested replacing the smugglers with official channels for migration:

> We pay 1,200 dollars to the smuggler - per person. They can charge us for 300 euros more or 200 euros more and then they will really fight the smuggling networks. That is when the smuggler will be unable to do anything.

While our research does provide testimonies to the violence that people face while crossing the Mediterranean Sea by boat, this includes violence not only on the part of smugglers, but also by authorities along the way. Often anti-smuggling efforts increase risks for people seeking to migrate, particularly when they are driven to do so regardless of the deterrent measures put in place by the EU. The demand posed to the EU here is for an alternative approach in which migration is facilitated by the creation of legal and safe routes.

TOWARD PEOPLE-DRIVEN POLICIES

Our research not only points to the ineffectiveness of deterrence and the limits of anti-smuggling measures, but also to the failure of reception and asylum provision within the EU and the constraints of partnerships that are designed to address root causes of migration at the source. The migratory journeys and experiences our research participants describe are characterized by fluid and fragmented journeys, intersecting drivers and conditions of flight, violence en route and a search for rights that is often thwarted by a lack of official information, substandard conditions and legal barriers.

A significant number arrive in EU countries not because of their desire to reach "destination Europe," but because they are forced to flee, whether from their home countries or from intermediate stops along their migratory route.

While policy initiatives have been put forward with increased speed and intensity since the EU policy agenda was launched in May 2015, many of those measures have failed to appreciate and respond to the nuances of the experiences of those making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Our research suggests that, so long as this is the case, the European Agenda on Migration will fail, and people will continue to die at sea.

This failure is not lost on our research participants. As one Syrian woman put it when we spoke to her in Kos: "We just want our voice to be heard in the world. We want safety. And we want them to treat people like they are humans and not animals."

Our research indicates that a key dimension of EU policy failure in the field of migration lies precisely in its distance from the reality of migration. Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat responds to this failure by advancing policy proposals grounded in our direct engagement with the actual people engaged in migration. A more effective policy approach would:

- Replace a deterrent approach with interventions that address the diverse drivers of unauthorized movement.
- Revise migration and protection categories to reflect the intersecting drivers and conditions that impel people to move.
- Open sufficient safe and legal routes to the EU for people who otherwise have to resort to precarious journeys.
- Invest in reception facilities and improved access to key services.

- End policies that violate or restrict access to rights.
- Promote accurate and rights-oriented information campaigns.

Unless and until that happens, the EU's migration agenda will continue to fail, people will continue to cross the Mediterranean in search of safety, and many of them will continue to die.

Dr. Vicki Squire is reader in international security at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick. This story has been updated since its original publish date of July 11, 2017.

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