

THE NEW AND MISUNDERSTOOD CLASS OF CITIZENS – REFUGEES

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‘Refugees are people who leave their homes in order to seek safety, or refuge. In general, people become refugees to flee violence, economic disparity, repression, natural disasters, and other harsh living and working conditions.’¹ Refugees are found in scenarios of inflexible conflict. They are seen to flee from unavoidable and prolonged periods of violence, deaths, armed attacks and they are running away from a situation of harsh living conditions which is a byproduct of the ongoing conflict. The more narrow definition of Refugees has been given by The United Nations; "persons who are outside their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group."²

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), defines Refugees as, "When a fleeing civilian crosses an international frontier, he or she becomes a refugee and as such is eligible to receive international protection and help."³

As of January 2002, the UNHCR tolled that nearly 12 million refugees were present across the globe. This number although remained consistent for the most part since the 1980s, has increased substantially owing to the presence of ISIS in the Middle East and Eastern regions of Europe.⁴

Before the widespread presence of ISIS, Asia was seen to host almost half the world refugee population. Europe was barely affected by the swamp of refugees although the situation has

¹ Refugees Beyond Intractability, (2016), [Beyondintractability.org](http://www.beyondintractability.org). (Last viewed 7 March 2016), <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/refugees>

² United Nations, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (Last viewed 28th February 2016); <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=basics>

³ United Nations. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (Last viewed 28th February 2016) <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

⁴ Id.

changed for the worse in the second decade of the 21st century. Europe is now the parent haven for refugees.

The Syrian Civil war has caused approximately 2.7 million Syrians to leave their country since 2011, and double that many are expected to have fled Syria by the end of 2014.⁵

In the summer of 2015, Europe experienced the highest influx of refugees since the Second World War. The numbers were tolled up to 3.9 million refugees from Syria. Syria has turned into a hot spring for refugees since 2013 owing to the Syrian Civil War brought about by Bashar-al-Assad after the Arab Spring. Many of the Syrians are said to be displaced within Syria and over 4 million have fled the country since 2014. Initially the fleeing was mostly resorted to Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. The Syrians who fled are Sunnis but their Sunni neighbours such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain have taken zero refugees.

The UN and the World Food Programme were not prepared for a refugee crisis on this scale. As a result, many refugee camps are overcrowded and under supplied. It is shocking to note that no organization in the world had anticipated an exodus of refugees thereby not constructing proper infrastructure to take care of the pouring numbers of homeless people. United Nations have declared that the poor conditions in already shaky regions of Iraq and Lebanon have driven the Refugees to look for shelter elsewhere, thus arriving at Europe. But upon careful reading of the European Union reports of Shelter Programmes, Migrant Programmes, etc we see that the European Union, in 2007-14 had invested 2 billion Euros into Border Patrol, High-tech security and defenses but not enough into preparation for influx of asylum seekers.⁶

As per International Law governing the areas of European Union, the Dublin Regulation dictates that Refugees coming to Europe have to seek asylum in the nation they arrived in first, thus putting a lot of pressure on small countries such as Italy and Greece. But countries like

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan, 3 (Dec. 13, 2013), <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=52b170e49&query=syria%20response%20plan>

⁶ How Xenophobia Could Ruin the Best Thing About the EU. (2015). The Nation. (Last viewed 7 March 2016), <http://www.thenation.com/article/how-xenophobia-could-ruin-the-best-thing-about-the-eu/>

Greece were not able to take care of so many people entering its borders for asylum owing to its financial crisis of the Great Recession.⁷

In a time of need, where the world needed to come together we see that more and more countries were backing out of taking in Refugees, leaving the border states alone in their struggle. Big economies such as France, United Kingdom and Germany put their walls up and declared that refugees shall not be allowed inside. Although later in 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that they will take in all Syrian Refugees regardless and revoke the Dublin Regulation temporarily. Germany prepared to take in 800,000 refugees. EU in 2014 had collectively only taken roughly 600,000 refugees. But Germany imposed new sanctions for border control soon after.⁸

Most humanitarian aid, generosity and support for asylum seekers mostly come from civilians across and not from politicians. But there are fears in the Western World – Islam, high birth rate, social collapse system and crimes.

But statistics from studies of several institutions prove contrary to the fears of the West. Even if EU takes in all the 4 million refugees, all of them being Muslims, that would increase the rate of Muslims in the European population only by 4% from 3%, thus Europe will not turn into an Islamic State and the Muslims will continue to be a minority. Birth Rates are said to be high amongst the Muslims but owing to low rates in Europe, especially Germany with an aging population, migrants might be the answer to rejuvenating their young population/work force. The native population shall not be overridden.

Most Syrian Refugees already are educated. Many of them carry smart phones. This piece of news has widely created the misconception that these refugees don't really need help. Social Media and the internet have become a vital part of being a refugee. GPS is used to navigate the long routes to Europe; Facebook groups give tips and information about obstacles in real time. This only proves that refugees are very similar to everyone else and need not be feared of.

⁷ Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 (Last viewed 7 March 2016), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003R0343&from=EN>

⁸ Germany on edge as refugee tensions rise. (2015). NewsComAu. (Last viewed 7 March 2016), <http://www.news.com.au/finance/economy/world-economy/germany-on-edge-as-migrant-tensions-rise/news-story/154c4fc839121a9a590b823885d55b17>

The fear that refugees lead to higher crime rates also turns out to be wrong. Refugees who become immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than the native population. When allowed to work, they tend to start businesses and integrate themselves into the work force as fast as possible, paying more into the social system than they extract from them.⁹

The European Union is the wealthiest bunch of economies in the Earth with well organized States, functioning social systems, infrastructure, democracy and huge industries. It can handle the challenge of the refugee crisis if it wants to. The same can be said for the whole western world including United States, Australia, etc.

While the small nation of Jordan has taken in over 600,000 Syrian Refugees, the United Kingdom, which has 78 times the GDP of Jordan, has declared to take in only 20,000 Syrians over the next five years. Likewise, the United States has agreed to take in 10,000 and Australia, 12,000 Syrian refugees. For the most part, little assistance reaches a person fleeing a conflict until he or she crosses an international border.

Overall things are slowly getting better with nations like Canada paving the humanitarian way for a better world for those who've seen nothing but violence, but not fast enough. How do we want to be remembered is a question that all nations must ponder over. As xenophobic rich cowards behind fences? Nations who are signed to the United Nations have a responsibility to understand that refugees fleeing death and destruction are no different from the rest of us. By accepting them into our countries and integrating them into our societies, we have much to gain. There is only something to be lost if we ignore this crisis, ignore our humanitarian ways and reason.

⁹ Alexander, M. (2015). DEBUNKED: The European Refugee Crisis and Syria Explained. Psych and Society. (Last viewed 7 March 2016), <https://ofpsychandsociety.wordpress.com/2015/09/24/debunked-the-european-refugee-crisis-and-syria-explained/>