

The current humanitarian crisis is unprecedented with an appalling and unacceptable human cost. The number of refugees is unparalleled in recent times. The diversity of nationalities, motives for migration and individual profiles also creates a huge challenge for asylum systems and welcoming communities in main European destination countries. Moreover, given the complexity of its main driving forces, there is unfortunately little hope that the situation will improve significantly in the near future.

*This issue of **Migration Policy Debates** looks at the most recent developments in the humanitarian migration crisis and what makes this crisis different from previous ones.*

Is this humanitarian migration crisis different?

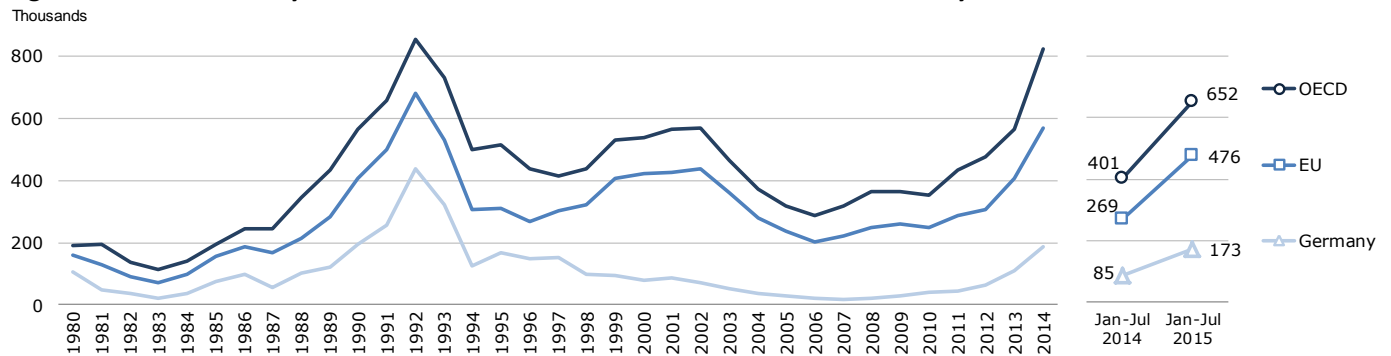
- Europe will record in 2015 an unprecedented number of asylum seekers and refugees with up to one million asylum applications; an estimated 350 000 to 450 000 people could be granted refugee or similar status, more than in any previous European refugee crisis since World War II.
- In recent months the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes have gained importance with relatively large numbers of people starting to leave or transit via Turkey. The Central Mediterranean route, which leads to Italy, also continued to be heavily used. According to the latest available estimates more than 330 000 persons have arrived by sea in Europe since January this year, including about 210 000 landings in Greece and 120 000 in Italy.
- As during previous refugee crises in the 1990s the impact is concentrated in a few countries. In the OECD, Turkey is the most affected, currently hosting as many as 1.9 million Syrians as well as a large number of people from Iraq. Within the EU, Italy, Greece and Hungary are on the front line but the main destination countries are Germany, in absolute terms, and Sweden and Austria, relative to their population.
- More than in previous crises, asylum seekers are very diverse in terms of country of origin, profile and motivation. This increases the pressure on asylum systems in destination countries.
- Recent refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) are more skilled than other groups and those who came, for example, during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. There are more unaccompanied minors (children without a responsible adult to care for them) arriving now than previously.
- Refugee flows tend to concentrate in countries with the most favourable economic conditions. A strong jobs market seems to be the most important determinant of flows for main refugee groups.
- Europe has better legal and institutional systems in place for asylum-seekers and migrants than it did in the 1990s. However, these have not ensured a fair burden-sharing between countries, and have not prevented people from choosing smuggling routes.
- In the current emergency situation, several countries are struggling to welcome, assist and process very large number of incoming people. Some regions and localities are under intense pressure. Coordination between different levels of governance will be key to prevent local communities from being overwhelmed. Since the 1990s, many EU countries have developed better settlement services for refugees which should help to cope in the medium term.
- For several EU countries, large-scale asylum inflows are a new experience. This is the case, for example, for Hungary and to a lesser extent for Poland and Bulgaria. Financial and technical support from other EU countries and from EU institutions is critical to enable them to respond to the emergency.
- In the short run, processing and supporting such large numbers of asylum seekers will be costly. In the long-run, much will depend on how well successful asylum seekers are integrated. This will require early and intensive efforts to provide language training, assess individual skills, provide school access, address health and social problems, and work with employers to help boost refugees' chances of employment.
- Past experience of refugee crises suggests that migrants can, eventually, become valued and valuable contributors to the economic and social health of countries.

The unfolding humanitarian crisis: how does it compare with previous ones?

The refugee crisis in Europe is unprecedented in terms of the number of people involved ...

In 2014, 630 000 asylum requests were registered in EU member countries, a number last reached during the conflict between Bosnia and Serbia in 1992. According to most recent available data, up to 700 000 asylum applications have been already filed so far this year¹, and the number could reach 1million by the end of the year. Between 350 000 and 450 000 people could be granted humanitarian protection in Europe in 2015 (refugee status, subsidiary protection status, or permission to stay for humanitarian reasons).

Fig 1. Number of new asylum seekers 1980-2014 in the OECD, the EU and Germany



In Europe, most people who seek asylum have entered through illegal border crossings. According to Frontex data for the first eight months of 2015, 500 000 illegal border crossings were detected, compared with 280 000 for all of 2014. More than 330 000 people have crossed the Mediterranean this year already. According to UNHCR data, 15% of them were children and more than 80% of the adults were men².

... with new migration routes emerging

Through 2015 and in particular during the summer, not only inflows surged but the routes used by asylum seekers also changed. The **“Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route”**, which is mainly used by asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, has been more frequently used, including by Pakistani and selected African migrant groups as well as by people leaving the Western Balkans territories themselves. In the first half of 2015, 66 000 people crossed the Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece and more than 137 000 people more did so in July and August. Many of them headed to Hungary, where illegal border entries consequently spiked³. This route is also largely used by families with children. This corridor may remain heavily used in the future unless Eastern border routes partly substitute.

Not everyone arrives directly from their home country. About 2 million Syrians, mostly under temporary protection status, are estimated to be currently in Turkey. Another 300 000 persons, mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, are residing unlawfully in Turkey while waiting to transit to seek refuge in the EU. More than 1.1 million Syrians are currently in Lebanon where the situation is increasingly unstable. Large numbers are also recorded in Jordan (630 000) and Egypt (130 000). As time goes on, the increasing difficulty of refugees currently living in the neighbouring countries of Syria - to find employment, make a legal living, and to send their children to school- is seen as one of the main factors for the rapid increase in migration to Europe.

Many people from the Western Balkans also use the “Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route”. Kosovars dominated this group until April 2015, when Albanians appeared in large numbers. The exact reasons for the rapid increase in migration from these territories are unclear; it is likely driven by poor economic conditions and very high youth unemployment, by easier access to Serbia with Kosovar identification documents, by the opening of smuggling

¹ Data refer to January to early September and include pre-registration in Germany.

² <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

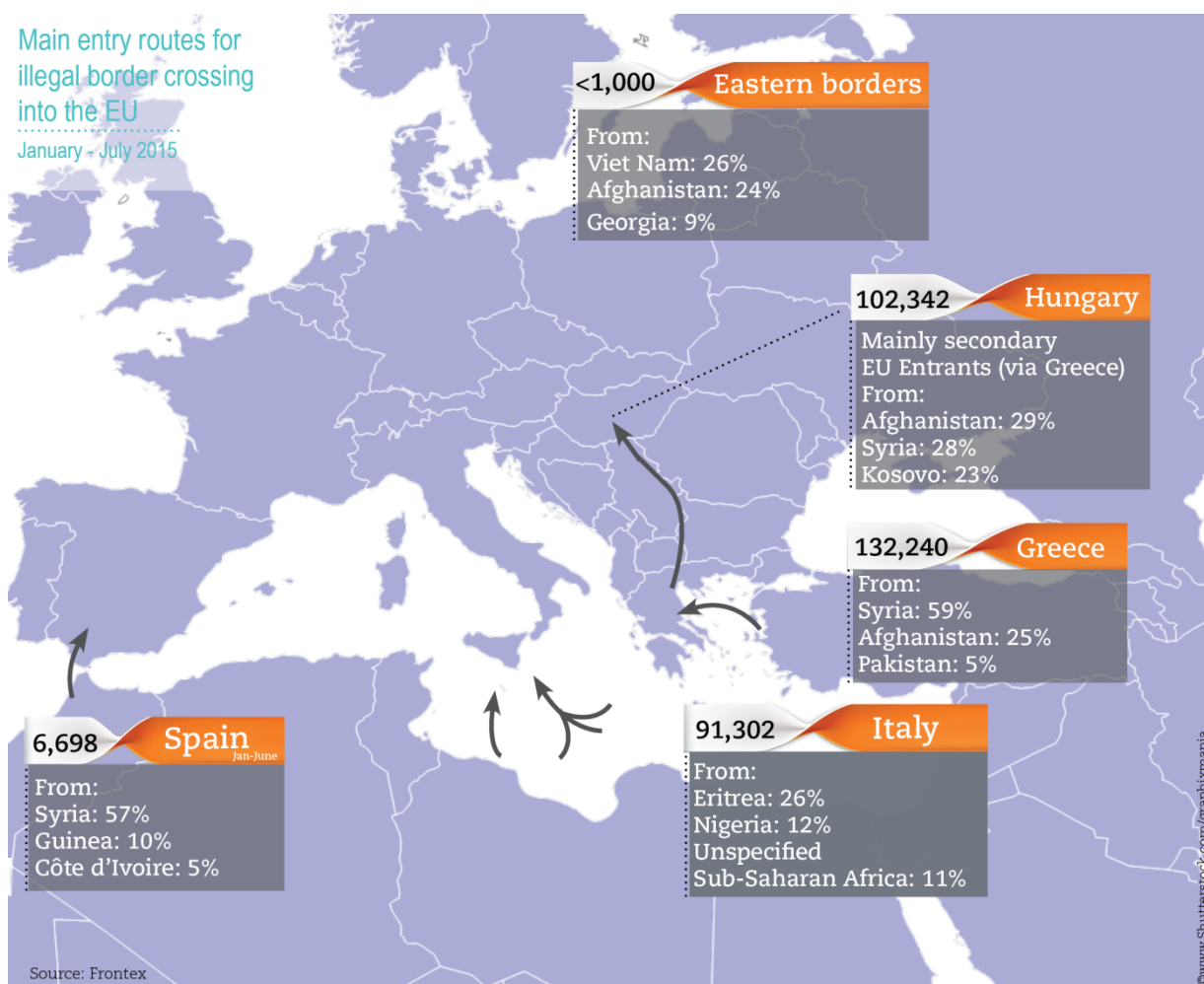
³ Between January and mid-September 2015, the Hungarian authorities have recorded as many as 190 000 illegal entries.

routes in the region and by persistent rumours about accessibility of employment or social benefits in some destination countries. However, in all EU countries, “recognition rates”, that is, the share of asylum seekers obtaining a refugee status, are close to zero for people originating from the Western Balkans. An information campaign in Kosovo and faster application processing, notably in Germany, had helped reduce the pressure from that territory by late summer 2015. The same may happen in the case of Albanian migrants in coming months. Establishing a common EU list of safe countries of origin – which would include these territories - should also help greatly, along with other measures to reduce incentives to seek asylum even in cases when this is clearly unfounded.

The “**Central Mediterranean route**” from Libya to Italy is also much used still. Boats have continued to land in Italy in 2015, with almost 116 000 arrivals detected by the end of August 2015 (compared to 172 000 arrivals in all of 2014). There is, however, a shift in the nationality of people arriving by boats or rescued from sea near Libya and brought to Italy. While Syrians and Eritreans each accounted for about a fourth of the inflows in 2013 and 2014, only 6% of all people using this route in 2015 were Syrian. Many of the Syrians are now using other entry channels given the danger of this route. It is also more difficult to reach Libya since Egypt and Algeria have introduced a visa obligation for Syrians. Smuggling networks, which are well established in Libya and in the Sahel, reacted by targeting other countries of origin. By mid-2015, the main nationalities passing through this route were Eritreans (27%), Nigerians (11%), Somalians (9%), Gambians (5%) and Sudanese (5%). The route is likely to be used less during the winter season but will remain important in the future unless the business case of smuggling networks can be weakened or if the situation in Libya stabilises.

The third channel, the “**Western Mediterranean route**” goes through the Spanish Ceuta and Melilla enclaves or through the Strait of Gibraltar. This route was traditionally used by sub-Saharan migrants, but due to tighter border controls and co-operation with the Moroccan authorities, it has become less accessible.

Map 1. Main entry routes to Europe by irregular migrants and refugees, January-July 2015



Box 1. Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers what do these words mean?

In the public debate, the terms 'asylum seeker', 'refugee' and 'migrant' are often used synonymously. However, it is important to distinguish the three terms.

The term 'migrant' corresponds to a generic term for anyone moving to another country with the intention to stay for a minimum period of time (i.e. it excludes tourists and business visitors). It includes both permanent and temporary migrants with a valid residence permit or visa, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants who do not belong to any of the three mentioned groups.

According to the UN definition, a long term migrant is a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. OECD reports usually define permanent migrants as people who have a status that enables them to stay in the country under prevailing circumstances. Among this group one can distinguish between four broad categories: long-term migrants within a free mobility zone; labour migrants; family migrants; and humanitarian migrants.

'Asylum seekers' are persons who have formally submitted a request for asylum but have not yet completed the asylum procedure, i.e. whose request for asylum is pending. They are still candidates for humanitarian migrant status. In practice, only a minority of asylum seekers obtains some form of humanitarian migrant status and the others have the obligation to leave the country. If people remain after being denied such status they become undocumented migrants.

The term 'humanitarian migrant' refers to persons who have completed the asylum procedure with a positive outcome and have been granted some sort of protection (refugee status or another form of protection) or have been resettled through programmes outside the asylum procedure. For the sake of simplicity this brief considers all recipients of protection – whether refugee status, temporary protection, subsidiary protection, etc. – to be humanitarian migrants.

In addition to migrants formally filing an asylum request, there are many people who have not filed an asylum request, either because they do not want to file it in the country through which they are transiting, or because there is a long wait to apply for asylum (either due to large inflows, as in Germany, or understaffed asylum systems), or because they know their prospects for obtaining humanitarian migrant status are slim. These people are also considered as undocumented migrants.

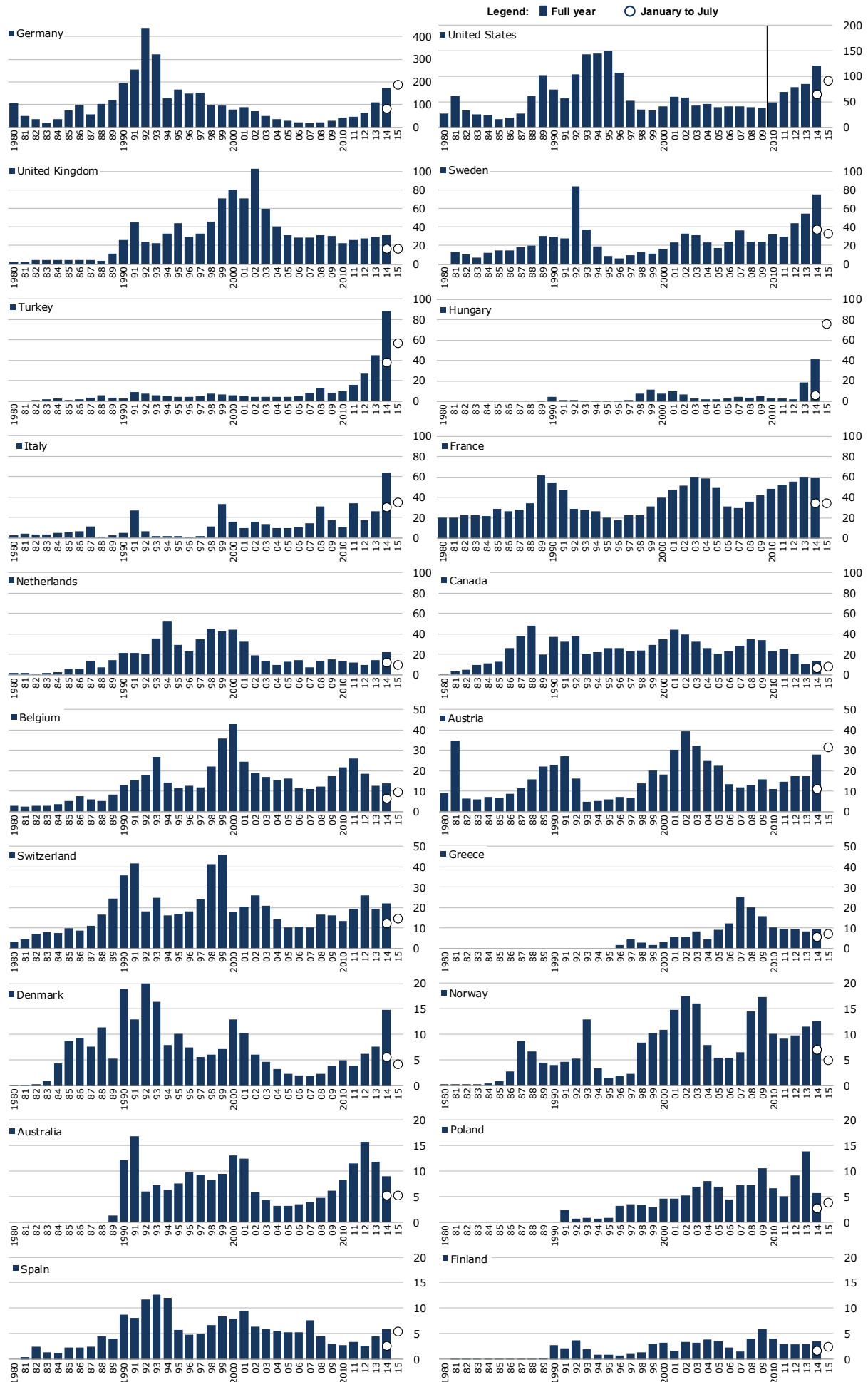
The term migrant can therefore be used as a generic term to describe a situation where flows are mixed. Clearly not all people who currently enter the EU illegally will claim asylum and, among those who will do, only a fraction will be granted refugee status. This is why this brief uses the term migrant. However, it would not be entirely correct to refer to this crisis as a 'migration crisis'. Legal migration systems that enable people to enter with valid visa/permit are in place and tend to be adequately managed. What is currently observed would therefore be better described as a 'refugee' or 'asylum crisis' because it concerns specifically the European asylum system.

A few countries are particularly exposed

Italy, Greece and Hungary are clearly on the front line even though most migrants do not ask for asylum in these countries but rather try to transit through these countries in order to reach Germany or, less frequently, Sweden, Austria and Switzerland. The main destinations are similar to those observed in the early 1990s – Germany in absolute numbers and Austria, Sweden and Switzerland in per-capita terms (3.3, 7.8 and 2.7 per 1000 respectively in 2014).

If Germany receives 800 000 people intending to ask for asylum in 2015, as announced by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in August, this would be equivalent to 1% of its population. This would be in absolute numbers the largest annual inflow of people seeking asylum of any OECD country ever recorded. In contrast, in September 2015, Sweden forecast a slight decline in the number of applications for the year to 74 000, compared to 81 300 in 2014. This would still leave Sweden among the top three receiving countries on a per capita basis. Hungary also received a large number of asylum applications in the first half of 2015 (more than 65 000) but many applications are terminated prematurely as people leave the country, most likely to re-apply in another EU member state.

Fig 2. Asylum seeker requests in selected OECD countries, 1980-2015 (thousands)



Source: UNHCR.

In other countries such as France, the United Kingdom or Switzerland, the number of asylum seekers has so far not increased significantly. The United Kingdom received far fewer people than in the recent past; its peak year was 2002, with 100 000 applications (mostly from Iraq) compared to 31 200 in 2014. In Switzerland, the recent levels (22 000 in 2014) are significantly below those of 1991 and 1999 (around 40 000 each time, mostly from former Yugoslavia). In France, the 2014 level (about 60 000 applications) is similar to those seen in 1989 and 2004-05 (mostly from Turkey, notably in 1989).

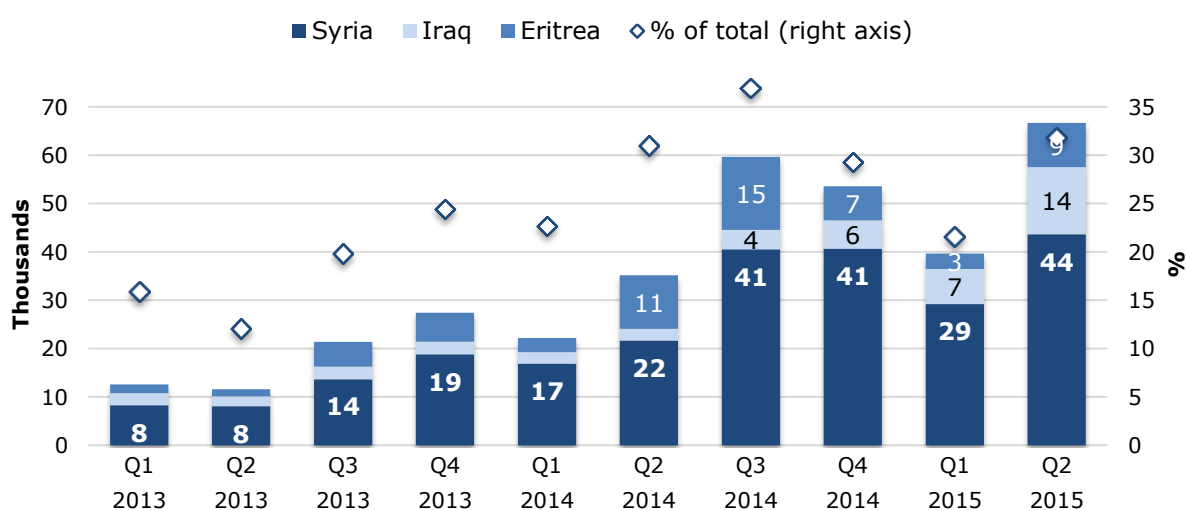
For several EU countries, large-scale asylum inflows are a new experience. This is the case, for example, for Hungary and to a lesser extent for Poland and Bulgaria. Financial and technical support from other EU countries and from EU institutions is critical to enable them to respond to the emergency. This is also true for the main entry points in Europe, namely Greece, Italy and Malta.

In non-European OECD countries, however, the pressure on asylum systems is not particularly strong. In Australia, following a series of measures to discourage illegal arrivals, the number of people seeking asylum fell below 10 000 in 2014 and is likely to remain below that level in 2015. On the contrary, in the United States, the 2014 numbers remain at a relatively high level, around 120 000, but still below the peak of the mid 1990s when inflows mostly came from El Salvador.

The origins of asylum seekers in Europe are more diverse than in previous refugee crises, and many come from far away

Much of the recent public focus has been on the large inflows of Syrian refugees in Europe; in reality, however, the origins of refugees are very heterogeneous. In 2014, the main countries and territories of origin of asylum seekers in the European Union were Syria (21%), Kosovo (9.6%), Eritrea (6.4%) and Iraq (2.6%). In 2015, the composition shifted. Now, Syria, Eritrea and Iraq, the only nationalities covered by the relocation scheme proposed by the European Commission on 9 September 2015, together represented only about a quarter of all asylum claims in the first six months of the year. However, this share increased to more than one third in June 2015, and is expected to continue to grow both as the inflows from the Eastern Mediterranean route increase and as fewer asylum applications are made by Western Balkan nationals.

Fig 3. Quarterly applications of Syrians, Iraqis and Eritreans in the EU, 2013-2015, (thousands and percentages)



Source: UNHCR.

The large variety of migration routes, countries of origin and underlying motives for migration make this refugee crisis particularly difficult to address. Not only do migrants come from diverse countries and territories of origin, but the top asylum countries also vary significantly across the EU. In Germany, in the first 6 months of 2015, Kosovo and Syria each accounted for 20% of the total asylum seekers, followed by Albania (15%). In

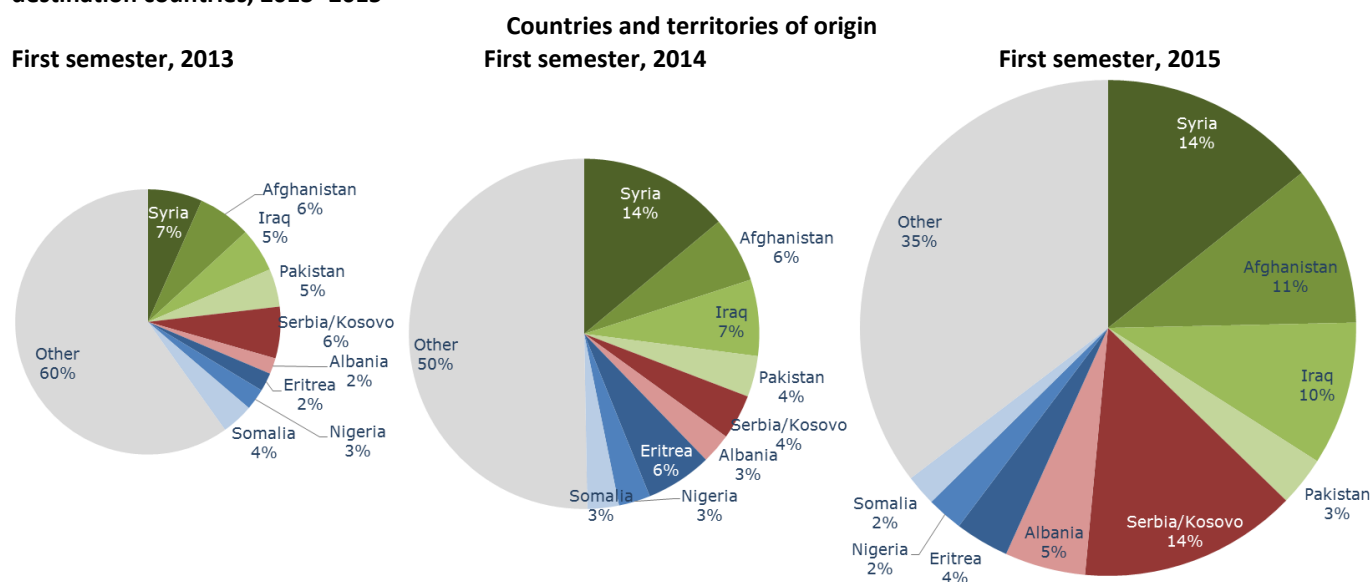
Sweden, Syrians accounted for 27%, followed by Eritreans and Afghans, at just over 10%. In France, Kosovo was the first origin (10%) followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Russian Federation. In Italy, Gambia was first followed by Senegal and Nigeria. In the United Kingdom, Pakistan and Eritrea (9% each) were followed by Iran. This diversity to a large extent reflects the size of established communities, language and historical ties, geographical proximity and to some degree also differences in recognition rates by country of origin/destination. But it also reflects the different routes taken and the use of smuggling networks for some nationalities.

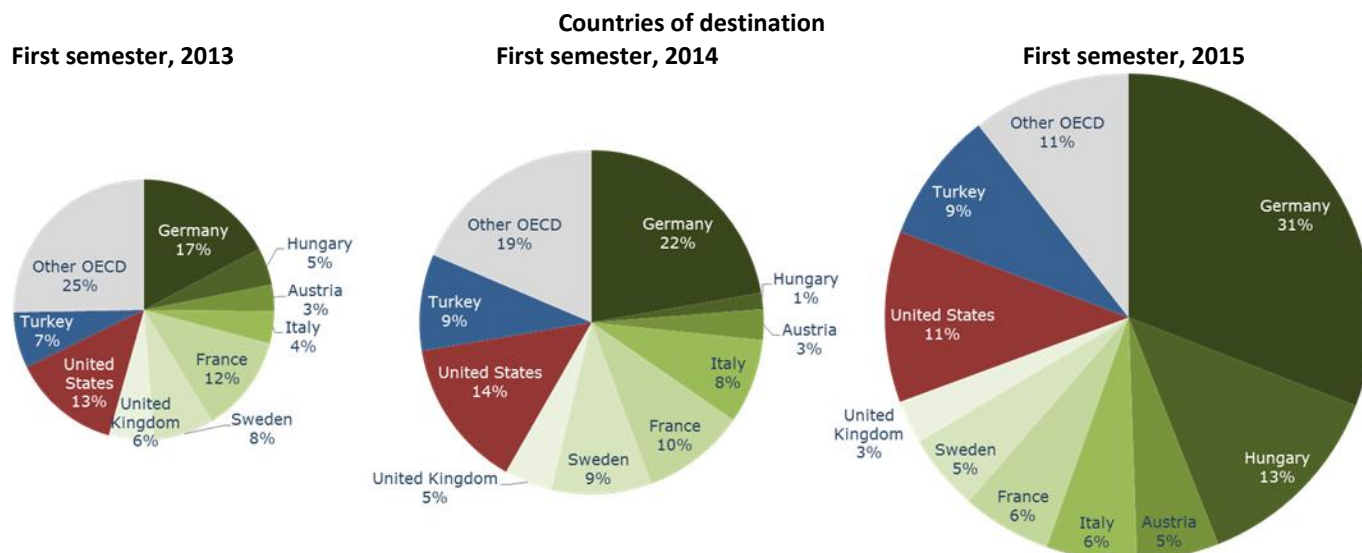
One way of showing the greater diversity of the inflows is to calculate the number of origin countries that combined reach at least 60% of all applications. In a number of countries, diversity has significantly increased when compared with the 1990s. This is particularly striking for example in France (the number of countries of origin accounting for 60% of the flows increased by 40%) and even more in Germany and Switzerland where the number of countries doubled. By contrast, in Austria and Sweden, diversity in terms of countries of origin is lower and stable. Such diversity across the EU is obviously very challenging because **it requires dealing with different issues in terms of both tackling the flows and subsequent integration of diverse groups of people.**

In addition, several important origin countries with a relatively low recognition rate cannot necessarily be considered as safe countries. Applicants from these countries cannot have their application rejected without an individual assessment. The need to deal with applications from many different countries **limits the ability to speed up application processing** and raises the pressure on asylum systems in many countries.

Lastly, it is worth noting that compared to previous refugee crises, people from the EU's neighbour countries are less present in asylum flows and many people are travelling long distances to claim asylum in Europe. The average distance between the destination and origin country has increased by 20% on average in the EU, compared to the inflows received in the early 1990s. In some countries like Italy it tripled, while in the case of Austria and Sweden it increased by more than 50%. This implies that **people are therefore paying higher fees to smugglers** but also that **the cost and difficulty of return will be in many cases greater.**

Fig 4. Evolution of the distribution of asylum seekers in the EU by main countries and territories of origin and by destination countries, 2013 -2015





Source: UNHCR.

Asylum seekers and refugees are often low-educated, but many others have good qualifications

Contrary to public perception, **refugees are generally not the poorest of the poor in their country of origin and tend to have higher skill levels than the general population in origin countries.** There are however variations across countries of origin and destination as well as across migration waves.

Looking at the education distribution of people residing in the EU who came as humanitarian migrants between 1988 and 1993, a large number of whom are from the former Yugoslavia, reveals that on average 15% have a tertiary degree (33% in Sweden, compared to less than 10% in Austria and Germany).

Among the recently arrived Syrian nationals, the share of people with a post-secondary diploma appears to be much higher. According to Statistics Sweden, more than 40% of Syrians in the country in 2014 have at least upper secondary education, compared to 20% of those from Afghanistan and 10% for those coming from Eritrea.

In the case of Germany, there is no systematic recording of the educational level and qualifications of asylum seekers, but they are asked (on a voluntary basis) about their education and occupational skills during the application procedure. On average for those who came in 2014, 15% of the asylum seekers had a tertiary degree, 16% had upper secondary education (Gymnasium), 35% lower secondary education, 24% attended only primary school and 11% had not attended school at all. Syrian refugees, however, were on average better educated: 21% of the Syrian asylum seekers who came to Germany between the beginning of 2013 and September 2014 said that they had attended university, 22% had received upper secondary education and 47% had obtained either lower secondary or primary education.

In the case of France, based on survey data (ELIPA), in 2010, 14% of all refugees had attained tertiary educational level and 43% at least secondary education. The percentage of tertiary educated was slightly higher for those coming from Europe (20%) and lower for those originating from sub-Saharan Africa (10%).

Refugees have skills (many of them have college degrees) even if they are less highly educated than the general population in the welcoming countries and in most cases also less than migrant workers. Enabling refugees to become language-proficient, to get their educational and professional credentials recognised and in some cases to complement their skills with additional training, will be critical for their successful integration as well as for a positive economic impact of these flows in destination countries.

Arrivals of unaccompanied minors are increasing

A particularly striking and worrying characteristic of the current refugee crisis is the large number of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) among asylum seekers. Regardless of whether unaccompanied minors are considered asylum seekers or not, responsibility for them falls on the state – and often the municipality – where they are identified. Even when minors come from countries from which asylum applications are rarely successful, they often go into the asylum process. In 2014, the 24 000 unaccompanied minors applying for asylum comprised 4% of all asylum seekers in the EU.

Not all unaccompanied minors go into the asylum system. In Italy, for example, of 10 500 UAMs under state care in 2014, only 24% had applied for asylum. The situation is similar in Greece, where prior to the reform of the asylum process almost none of the minors applied for asylum. In France, the number of UAMs applying for asylum actually fell in 2014 – to fewer than 300 - while the number under state guardianship was close to 4 000. Since UAMs live in open centres, many move out, including to other European countries to meet up with family. About one-third of the UAMs in Italy vanish from the reception centres, often shortly after arrival. Other countries see minors staying. Sweden was already struggling with the rising numbers of UAMs in 2012 before it received about 4 000 UAMs in 2013 and 7 500 in 2014, almost all of whom went into the asylum system.

UAMs represent an enormous challenge in terms of providing housing, supervision, schooling and support measures for minors. In Greece, for example, more than 2 000 minors needed to be placed in housing in 2014, in the midst of a dire economic crisis and an overwhelmed asylum system.

A further complication is the need to prepare UAMs, who often arrive at 16 or 17 years of age with little or no formal schooling, for integration into society. Traditional schooling may not be an option, and upon turning 18, they leave state guardianship, even if they have yet to complete their basic education in the new country.

Looking forward, it is unlikely that pressure from sending countries will ease

The uncertainty regarding the ending of the conflicts in Syria and regarding the stabilisation of Libya creates a unique challenge compared with previous refugee crises where the international community had to deal with large inflows of refugees. At the same time, instability in Afghanistan and Iraq, two other main source countries of current inflows, appears likely to persist in the near future. Similarly it remains hard to see how the factors that prompt people to flee from Eritrea will soon vanish.

Looking forward, a range of risk factors could fuel flows within existing migration routes (e.g. further deterioration of security in Syria, Iraq or even Ukraine, instability in Lebanon). Demographic and economic factors in Sub-Saharan African countries will continue to generate a push for outmigration, as will high poverty and unemployment rates in the Western Balkans, especially among Roma.

The latest results of the Gallup World Poll on the intentions to emigrate from main countries of origin tend to confirm this outlook. The survey refers to 2007-2013 and thus does not reflect the changes in the political and social conditions in a number of key countries, but it suggests that pressure is high in a number of them and could possibly translate into large migration flows in the near future. More specifically, more than two fifths of the adult population in Nigeria state their intention to emigrate permanently, a much higher share than that in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. In addition, 10% of them plan to do so in the next 12 months and many of them are highly educated. The intention to emigrate is also high in Albania (close to 40%), as well as Serbia and Ukraine. Finally, migration pressure as measured by the intention to emigrate remains high in Afghanistan, where one in every four persons would like to emigrate permanently abroad.

Tab 1. Intention to emigrate for selected countries of origin, 2007-2013

	Persons who would move permanently, if they had the opportunity to do so (%)					Of which: Planning to move in the next 12 months (%)	Of which: Already made preparations	Preferred destinations		
	Total	Women	15-24	Highly educated	Employed			First	Second	Third
China (People's Republic of)	6	6	12	17	6	2	22	United States	Canada	France
Pakistan	12	8	15	26	17	13	50	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates	United Kingdom
Afghanistan	23	23	26	25	21	18	39	Iran	United States	Saudi Arabia
Asia and Oceania	8	7	14	17	8	7	44	United States	Saudi Arabia	United Kingdom
Albania	39	37	56	41	39	10	68	Italy	United States	Greece
Serbia	24	24	41	27	25	10	37	Germany	Switzerland	Austria
Ukraine	21	19	37	27	23	4	59	Russia	United States	Germany
Non-OECD Europe and Central Asia	17	15	28	20	17	5	45	Germany	United States	Russia
Côte d'Ivoire	25	24	33	41	28	39	28	United States	France	Canada
Mali	21	15	32	25	21	28	17	France	Spain	United States
Nigeria	44	42	55	41	37	10	37	United States	United Kingdom	Saudi Arabia
Senegal	37	29	51	36	34	25	20	United States	France	Spain
Sub-Saharan Africa	32	30	42	32	29	13	30	United States	United Kingdom	France
Iraq	19	15	24	21	19	24	50	Sweden	United States	United Kingdom
Libya	23	21	25	25	22	26	45	United Arab Emirates	Saudi Arabia	United States
Morocco	29	23	45	30	27	14	43	France	Italy	Spain
Syria	31	30	31	31	32	15	14	United Arab Emirates	United States	Canada
Tunisia	27	20	46	31	27	18	55	France	Italy	Germany
Middle East and North Africa	22	17	30	27	23	19	36	Saudi Arabia	France	United States

Source: OECD (2015 forthcoming) [Connecting with Emigrants: a global profile of Diasporas](#), Gallup World Poll survey

The immediate, short- and medium term policy challenges in receiving countries

Europe has already experienced large and sudden migration waves

No exact comparison can be made to the crisis Europe is facing today, but the continent has already experienced several other large-scale population movements in the not-so-recent past. The immediate post-Second World War period was marked by large population transfers, in particular to Germany and Poland, the post-colonial period saw large repatriation movements to France in 1962 (almost one million people), to Portugal in the mid-1970s (about 600 000 people in three years) and to a lesser extent to the United Kingdom and Belgium. All of these population movements were absorbed by these countries with very limited impact on their labour markets.

Large migration movements based on ethnic migration were also recorded, for example, in Greece between 1989 and 1993 (up to 160 000 Pontian Greeks from the Former Soviet Union) or in Germany between the late 1980s and the early 2000s (more than 3 million *Aussiedler* and *Spät-Aussiedler*). Outside Europe, Israel received about a million Jews from the former Soviet Union with their families in the decade following 1989.

Inflows of economic migrants of comparable magnitude have occurred in recent years as well: notably in Spain, which has witnessed a tripling of its foreign-born population (+4 million) between 2000 and 2010; in the United Kingdom where the EU-born population alone rose by 1 million since EU enlargement in 2004; but also in Germany which became, even before this refugee crisis struck, the second most important immigration country in the OECD after the United States, with more than 500 000 expected permanent legal entries in 2014 - twice the 2007 figure.

These migration waves were not about refugees but it is also possible to point to other large recent humanitarian crises such as the Bosnian conflict in 1992-95, which displaced about 1.2 million people, including about 800 000 to OECD countries and more than 300 000 to Germany alone. Also in 1992, more than 300 000 Albanians tried to resettle in Greece and Italy. The Kosovo war of 1998-99 resulted in large scale movements as well, mostly to neighbouring countries but also to several OECD countries. Germany, for example, recorded 78 000 asylum applications, Switzerland 53 000, Belgium and the United Kingdom approximately 25 000 each, and Austria 15 000.

In all the cases mentioned above, European countries, even if initially caught off guard, were generally able to deal successfully with the situation and largely integrated those migrants who remained. Countries also have benefited economically from these inflows in many cases, at least in the longer run. Not everything went smoothly, of course, and lessons should be learnt from these waves and their repercussions, to make sure that mistakes of the past are not repeated in the context of the current crisis. That would imply notably to provide immediate integration support and tailored access to skill development services. That would also require paying a

special attention to the integration of refugee women. The bottom line, however, is that **Europe has the proven capacity and the experience to find means to deal efficiently and appropriately with large migration movements.** The work of the OECD shows that migration, if well managed, can play a positive role in the economy and notably that immigrants tend to pay more in taxes and social security contributions than they receive in individual benefits (OECD 2013).

A difficult, albeit highly differentiated, economic environment in receiving countries

Migrants now arrive in an economic situation of large and unprecedented disparity across Europe. The economic situation at the southern Schengen border, in particular in Greece, is very difficult with high unemployment rates. By contrast, in Austria, Germany and Sweden – the three EU destination countries most affected by the recent increase in inflows apart from Hungary – unemployment is much lower than in the early 1990s, especially in Germany where the unemployment rate was 4.8% in the first quarter of 2015.

In Germany, opinion polls suggest that the more favourable economic situation is also linked with a more favourable public opinion regarding receiving refugees, although this has not prevented xenophobic attacks. Public opinion at least appears better prepared for immigration compared with the situation in the early 1990s.

There is, however, again significant disparity across Europe when it comes to attitudes towards migrants. In many countries, public opinion is now reluctant regarding additional immigration. Strong anti-immigrant parties have emerged in many countries and the public debate often focuses on problems of integration rather than possible opportunities arising from migration. In Europe, data from the 2014 Transatlantic Trends survey show that 40% of the population would prefer a more restrictive migration policy, whereas only 34% said policies were “about right now.” Recent polls show a quite divided public opinion in France, for example,⁴ and strongly in favour of a restrictive approach in several Eastern European countries. Overall, the sensitivity of public opinion to migration issues, exiting a major economic crisis with unemployment still high in several European countries, weighs on ongoing negotiations to find a co-ordinated and unified solution.

The demographic context has also changed significantly since the early 1990s, meaning that in many countries there is less competition for new jobs, especially for less skilled employment. In 1990, in all 24 European OECD countries, newly-entering youth cohorts into the labour market (15-24) were larger than the 55-64 age-group. In 2015, the situation has reversed in all but seven countries, with the lowest ratios now observed in some Eastern European countries. All countries showed a significant decline and in the OECD European countries as a whole, the ratio of youth cohorts to near-retirement-cohorts has declined from 1.3 to 0.7 since 1990.

A much improved legal and institutional context in Europe for asylum and migration...

Since the refugee crises of the early 1990s the institutional and legal frameworks in Europe have changed dramatically. Firstly, the adoption of the treaty of Amsterdam (1999), which moved asylum policy to the first pillar (community integration), and the Council of Tampere (1999) have opened the way to the development of the Common European Asylum System. Between 1999 and 2005, several legislative measures harmonizing common minimum standards for asylum were adopted (Reception Conditions Directive, Qualification Directive, Asylum Procedures Directive⁵) and the European Refugee Fund was created. In 2001, the Temporary Protection Directive allowed for a common EU response to a mass influx of displaced persons unable to return to their country of origin. However, Denmark does not apply EU-wide rules which relate to immigration, visa and asylum policies (opt-out) and Ireland and the United Kingdom choose, on a case-by-case basis, whether or not to adopt EU rules on immigration, visa and asylum policies (opt-in).

Secondly, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) started its operations in 2011 with the objective to develop practical cooperation on asylum, to support EU Member States under particular pressure and to collect and share information.

⁴ In comparison to the Kosovo crisis in 1999, the percentage of people who are favourable to welcome refugees decreased by 15 percentage points.

⁵ These Directives were initially adopted in 2003, 2004 and 2005 and have been revised in 2011 and 2013. All new Directives are applicable at least since July 2015.

Thirdly, the Dublin Convention - which came into force in 1997 for the first twelve signatories – has the aim of preventing multiple applications and limiting the risk of “asylum shopping”. Under the Dublin III Regulation⁶, the criteria for establishing responsibility for examining an application for international protection run, in hierarchical order, from family considerations, to recent possession of a visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered the EU irregularly, or regularly. In addition, this Regulation contains detailed rules on the transfer of applicants for international protection which apply once the determination of responsibility has been made.

This set of legislation now forms a solid basis for the EU common asylum policy, minimising disparities in treatments and rights across member States. The current crisis, however, revealed some of the weaknesses of the existing system in case of massive and sudden inflows. Since the Dublin Regulation will remain in force, the Commission will come forward with an evaluation and a possible proposal for the revision of this Regulation, which calls for the adoption of a common list of safe countries of origin and considers strengthening the return of people who have been denied a refugee status.

In the meantime, the European Union has extended to 13 new countries since 2004, most of which were previously neither major immigration nor emigration countries. This has contributed to significantly enhance the degree of free EU mobility. In addition, the adoption of the Schengen Agreement (effective in 1995) relaxed internal border controls and offered the possibility to travel without a passport between participating countries (currently 26 countries).⁷ Ireland and the United Kingdom obtained an opt-out when the Convention was integrated to the Amsterdam Treaty. Four EU countries have not yet joined the Schengen area but should in the future. Finally, Frontex was created in 2004 to foster co-operation to secure EU external borders.

These developments have created **a new environment for migration within Europe**, by creating a large free mobility area. This has produced sizeable benefits to EU countries by facilitating trade and tourism. Secondary movements within the EU are now easier, which contribute to making the implementation of the Dublin Regulation challenging in the current context. A reintroduction of controls at internal EU borders may revive smuggling networks and further increase the pressure on countries already at the forefront of the crisis simply because they are located at EU external borders.

In the context of such a large-scale crisis, existing instruments have shown their limits to ensure a fair burden-sharing but also their limited effectiveness in preventing people from choosing smuggling routes. The recent proposals of the European Commission to adopt an emergency as well as a permanent relocation mechanism for all Member States try to address the first issue. Regarding the second issue, to be considered more in the medium-term, viable policy options exist but would imply a bold, holistic and more global policy response.

... as well as a better capacity to respond

Many longstanding destination countries of asylum seekers have implemented structural changes in their asylum systems with the aim of speeding up the procedure and stepping up processing capacity. Most countries now also have a status of “safe origin country” which allows for a simplified procedure for asylum seekers from countries with little chance of obtaining asylum. In this respect, the capacity to respond is now better than in the early 1990s, even though those countries which were largely unprepared for the scale of these sudden inflows may still be struggling.

“Unstable status” as the outcome of the asylum process *now tends to be avoided* where possible, to facilitate integration of those likely to stay while putting more pressure on those who do not obtain asylum. In the early 1990s, for example, many humanitarian migrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina only received a “tolerated” status which generally excluded them from the labour market, often for many years. Now, most asylum seekers from

⁶ Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person

⁷ Reintroduction of temporary internal border controls is however possible in the event of a serious threat to public order and internal security.

conflict-riven countries obtain relatively stable forms of protection. Along with this, *access to the labour market has also been improved* – including for persons still in the process with a prospective to stay. This is important as OECD research (OECD 2014) suggests that early labour market entry is a key factor in ensuring a lasting integration.

Not only labour market access but also *integration systems* (reception, casework, language, placement, etc.) were poorly developed in the 1990s in most countries. They have greatly improved since, especially where current inflows are large: namely, Austria, Germany and Sweden. This increases the prospects for lasting integration. In addition, a European co-operation and integration support infrastructure is now also in place, through the European Fund for Asylum and Integration, although the Fund was obviously not designed to cope with this sort of emergency situation.

The immediate challenges of providing support to refugees ...

The reception and integration of refugees presents major challenges that should not be underestimated. It is a difficult and costly task in the short term. In Europe, many countries have introduction programmes for refugees. Indeed, most introduction programmes tend to be explicitly or implicitly targeted at humanitarian migrants, although other migrant groups – such as family migrants – may be eligible as well. The Scandinavian countries have the most experience with such programmes which generally last two to three years. The bulk of these programmes is generally related to language training, although recently the labour market focus has been strengthened, given that labour market integration is the most important determinant for migrants' economic independence, and a precondition for a positive economic impact of migration.

The United States has a programme which brings refugees from abroad for resettlement. Refugees are settled around the country, in coordination with organisations which receive federal funding for providing case work and services. The approach is front-loaded with the expectation that refugees will, where possible, rapidly enter the labour market. About one in four refugees opts for a six-month intensive support programme in lieu of cash support. Of these, three-quarters are self-sufficient by the end of this period. Most specific support tapers off after the first year, although some services are offered up to five years. Many refugees move from their first settlement destination, towards communities or job opportunities. Overall their employment rates are comparable to the national average or higher, although often in low-wage jobs and at a greater risk of poverty.

Canada, like the United States, has extensive experience in so-called “settlement services” for refugees, including language training, labour market and social integration. The word “settlement services” implies that the recipients of these services are expected to remain in Canada and become part of the Canadian society.

Australia has a similar policy for the integration of humanitarian migrants, which are generally resettled refugees as in Canada. It is centred around intensive support programmes focused on early practical support on arrival and throughout the initial settlement period to help humanitarian migrants settle into the community (Humanitarian Settlement Services); and early access to language training which is offered through flexible learning options to meet individual needs. The services offered vary widely depending on each individual migrant's circumstances and cover many aspects of economic and social integration (i.e. early practical support, English language courses, translating services, grant-based funding for projects to promote the integration of migrant groups etc.).

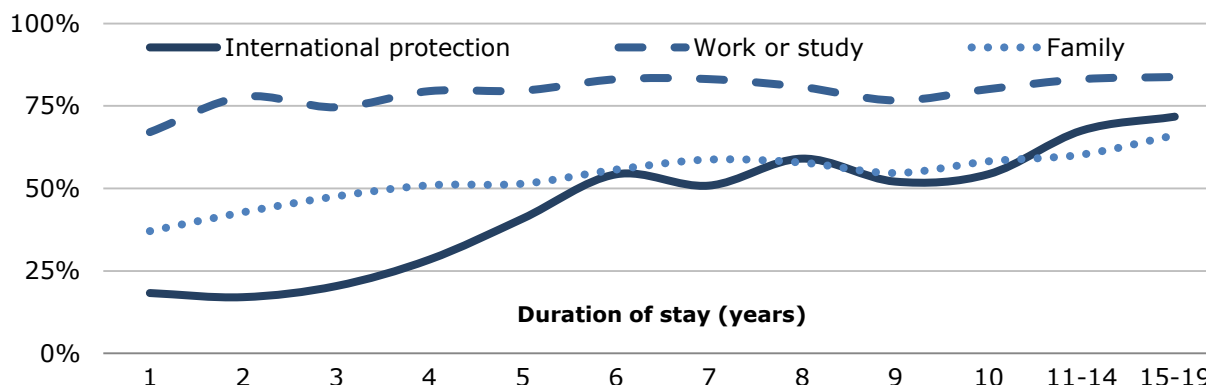
Several countries have a special category of private- or community-sponsored refugees which do not get the same breadth of integration support as those who are admitted through the regular government procedure.

... and of promoting their integration

Beyond the immediate humanitarian urgency, a key challenge will be to ensure the integration of the many refugees and their children that will remain in OECD countries. Evidence from the 2008 special module of the European Labour Force survey shows that on average in the past it took about six years for humanitarian migrants to reach the same level of employment as family migrants and as much as 15 years to reach a 70% employment rate and converge towards the outcomes for the native born and labour migrants (Figure 5). This delay can be shortened if appropriate integration policies are put in place to assess and develop migrants' skills and improve

their matching with employers' needs. In this regard, it will be particularly important for European countries to learn the lessons from the past as well as from other OECD countries.

Fig 5. Employment rate by immigrant categories and duration of stay in European OECD countries, 2008



Source: Eurostat Labour force survey (2008) ad-hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.

The integration of immigrants and their children has been a key element in the OECD's work on international migration for more than a decade. Among other related work, the Secretariat has undertaken fourteen country-specific reviews of integration through its "Jobs for Immigrants" project, often with a particular focus on refugees. In addition, it has gathered extensive comparative data on integration outcomes for immigrants and their children, through the joint EC-OECD publication "Settling In – Indicators of Immigrant Integration". In the context of the current refugee crisis, this work provides several important lessons (OECD 2014a).

First, successful integration requires comprehensive, well-tailored measures that consider the refugees' countries of origin, educational background, and family situation. As refugee flows increase and grow more diverse in most countries, integration policy instruments must be increasingly customised. Successful integration not only improves economic and fiscal benefits, it is also an important factor in social cohesion.

Second, integration of refugees needs to be viewed as an investment. This means policy should incorporate early intervention. The earlier refugees get labour market access, the better their integration prospects in the long run. It also implies that integration policies for refugees should not seek to pay off immediately. All refugees who settle need to build the basic skills that enable them to function in the host society, and involvement of and co-ordination with stakeholders at the local level is key to this, as integration entails important challenges for regional and local communities. It is also important to strike the balance between avoiding creating new high concentration areas of recent immigrants and accommodate people where jobs are and not simply cheap housing is. It is undoubtedly a costly approach but the benefits extend beyond the labour market to social cohesion and across generations, where their children may reap them. For children, early transition into the education system is crucial, and early training in the host country-language rapidly after arrival is key to this, including for children below primary school. Recent OECD work based on PISA show that it is particularly important to ensure that schools have the resources to help immigrant students learn the language of their host country – and help them to overcome the trauma of displacement (OECD 2015c).

Third, integration of refugees requires a three-step approach to make best use of their skills. To integrate refugees, the point of departure is to take stock of their qualifications and skills. As a result of this, there is in a second step often a need for supplementary education to bring them up to the standard required in the host country. Many refugees have good skills and qualifications, but these were acquired in labour markets and education systems that are very different from those in OECD countries and thus need some "bridging". Others lack the basic skills to succeed and need a lot of upfront training and education to get up to what is considered the minimum standard to succeed into the host country. This upskilling notably concerns the host-country language. The third step is to activate their skills, which is a particular challenge when refugees have been inactive for a number of years. This implies, among other things, to make sure that they have access to the appropriate measures, and to combat employer discrimination and prejudices.

Europe has both the capacity and the experience to respond

Europe has both the obligation and the capacity to deal with this unprecedented and tragic crisis. There are strong similarities with previous refugee crises (only a few countries are strongly affected and several of them are the same as in the 1990s) but the flows are more mixed in terms of migration routes, countries of origin and education profile of migrants. This poses significant challenges to asylum systems and for integration policies for those who remain.

Another striking difference with past crises is the fact that advances in communication technology and the emergence of new smuggling routes lead to rapidly changing situations. Moreover, the short-term prospect for substantial stabilization of the situation in the main source countries is slim. The situation may not only be a short-term emergency but a more structural condition with continued large flows to be expected in the years to come, fuelling a sentiment of anxiety about migration in many countries.

The short-term policy response which had to deal with saving lives at sea and addressing the challenge of burden-sharing has mobilised a great deal of the attention and energy of European countries. Now comes the time to focus the attention on emergency measures to welcome refugees and speed up the processing of asylum applications to avoid creating large backlogs and longer processing times. It is already critical to start considering the issue of the integration of those who will be granted refugee status. At the same time, it is urgent to tackle some of the root causes of the crisis and to ensure a co-ordinated and comprehensive policy response.

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Useful links

www.oecd.org/migration

www.oecd.org/migration/integrationindicators/

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