

LGSMUN
UNHCR
STUDY GUIDE

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, is a United Nations Agency mandated to protect and support refugees at the request of a government or the UN itself and assists in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.

Topic: Combatting Xenophobia in the 21st Century

Introduction

In today's world, contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination are complex and disturbing. These issues increasingly lie at the heart of political and social concerns. Faced with persistent expressions of racism and xenophobia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has, for several years now, been taking firm and sustained action to combat these trends. We can outline a few broad categories in which racism and racial discrimination occur: day to day life in major areas, such as employment, education, housing and access to social services; human rights violations; hostile attitudes to and stigmatization of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers; increasingly widespread anti-Semitic incidents; intensification of expressions of Islamophobia; use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic arguments in political discourse; and a negative climate in public opinion, which plays a crucial part in the emergence of expressions of racism and intolerance in society. These trends, of course, vary in scale from one country to another, but are significant enough to be of concern.

Significant headings have been given for ease, when preparing.

Syrian Refugee Crisis:

Anti-government demonstrations began in March of 2011, part of the Arab Spring. But the peaceful protests quickly escalated after the government's violent crackdown, and armed opposition groups began fighting back.

By July, army defectors had loosely organized the Free Syrian Army and many civilian Syrians took up arms to join the opposition. Divisions between secular and religious fighters, and between ethnic groups, continue to complicate the politics of the conflict. More than five years after it began, the war has killed over 250,000 people, half of whom are believed to be civilians. Bombings are destroying crowded cities and horrific human rights violations are widespread. Basic necessities like food and medical care are sparse.

The U.N. estimates that 6.1 million people are internally displaced. When you also consider refugees, well over half of the country's pre-war population of 22 million is in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, whether they still remain in the country or have escaped across the borders.

The situation in Syria went from bad to worse when outside parties began launching airstrikes in the fall of 2015. Each time bombing intensifies, our teams on the ground see an increase in the number of civilian casualties and families forced to leave their homes in search of safety.

In early February 2016, fighting around Aleppo City intensified. With roads into the city closed by conflict, Mercy Corps has not been able to resupply humanitarian aid to the people who depend on us. We are worried about how civilians will get food and other essentials.

The ability to provide lifesaving aid throughout the region is severely jeopardized as Mercy Corps balances the urgent need to both protect valuable supplies for unforeseen emergencies and ramp up distributions to those in need. We are stocking up supplies in areas where civilians may be cut off and strategically repositioning our staff.

A UN commission of inquiry has evidence that all parties to the conflict have committed war crimes - including murder, torture, rape and enforced disappearances. They have also been accused of using civilian suffering - such as blocking access to food, water and health services through sieges - as a method of war.

The UN Security Council has demanded all parties end the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas, but civilians continue to die in their thousands. Many have been killed by barrel bombs dropped by government aircraft on gatherings in rebel-held areas - attacks which the UN says may constitute massacres.

IS has also been accused by the UN of waging a campaign of terror. It has inflicted severe punishments on those who transgress or refuse to accept its rules, including hundreds of public executions and amputations. Its fighters have also carried out mass killings of rival armed groups, members of the security forces and religious minorities, and beheaded hostages, including several Westerners.

Isis and it's involvement with the refugee crisis:

Many Syrian refugees are living in Jordan and Lebanon, where Mercy Corps has been addressing their needs since 2012. In the region's two smallest countries, weak infrastructure and limited resources are nearing a breaking point under the strain.

In August 2013, more Syrians escaped into northern Iraq at a newly-opened border crossing. Now they are trapped by that country's own internal conflict, and Iraq is struggling to meet the needs of Syrian refugees on top of more than 1 million internally displaced Iraqis — efforts that we are working to support.

An increasing number of Syrian refugees are fleeing across the border into Turkey, overwhelming urban host communities and creating new cultural tensions. Mercy Corps is working in these areas as well to help families meet their urgent needs and build peaceful communities.

Few issues are now more urgent in the Middle East than defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It remains in control of large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, commits atrocities with publicized fervor, and has recently cultivated new allies in Afghanistan, Libya, and Yemen. It poses a direct threat to the United States' regional allies, as well as to Russian control of the Caucasus' Muslim populations. ISIS' involvement in the Syrian Civil War has exacerbated the conflict, leaving over 300,000 dead, two-thirds of the Syrian people in need of humanitarian aid, and some 11 million people uprooted (7 million internally displaced and 4 million refugees abroad). Despite widespread media coverage of the refugee crisis in Europe, neither European governments nor the current U.S. administration have been willing to deal with the root causes of the turmoil in Syria and Iraq.

The Syrian political structure has been fragmented since 1945, resulting in a barely functioning civilian government and a military that constantly interferes in the country's politics. Hafiz al-Assad (1930-2000), father to and predecessor of Syria's current president, came to power following a coup in 1971. Through the end of his reign in 2000, Hafiz al-Assad built up the country's military and infrastructure with funding from Arab donors and international lending institutions. Dissenters were ruthlessly suppressed.

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, current Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used the military to suppress peaceful demands for democratic change. The military now remains the only functioning institution in a country where an Alawite minority rules over a majority of Sunnis. Because the military acts as a stakeholder in close alliance with the state, the alternative to military-civilian rule is likely chaos and further political instability, with the potential for an extremist Sunni regime that provides a haven to terrorist groups. If the Syrian state collapses, minorities will be at risk. Even if Syria's minority Alawites were to accept a power sharing agreement with the majority Sunnis, they are frightened by the precedent set by de-Ba'athification in Iraq, where Shiite repression of minority Sunnis fueled the unrest that strengthened ISIS. Minority groups understandably fight in defense of the Assad regime, despite the great civilian hardship decimating their nation. The conflict's resemblance to Lebanon and Sri Lanka's drawn out civil wars is unmistakable.

The Refugees' Arrival In Europe:

In 2015, more than a million refugees crossed into Europe, resulting in crisis as countries struggled to cope up with influx, and creating division in the European Union over how to deal with resettling people.

While most of the people arrived via sea, some came through the land, basically from Turkey and Albania.

Only in January and February 2016, more than 126,000 landed in Greece, compared to this, only about 4,600 refugees arrived over the same period of time. More than 150,000 refugees have reached Europe since then.

UNHCR has a policy of helping refugees to settle in the host country by using their own existing skills, and to meet their own needs and the needs of the country:

“Ensure the right of refugees to access work and other livelihood opportunities as they are available for nationals... Match programme interventions with corresponding levels of livelihood capacity (existing livelihood assets such as skills and past work experience) and needs identified in the refugee population, and the demands of the market... Assist refugees in becoming self-reliant. Cash / food / rental assistance delivered through humanitarian agencies should be short-term and conditional and gradually lead to self-reliance activities as part of longer-term development... Convene internal and external stakeholders around the results of livelihood assessments to jointly identify livelihood support opportunities.”

Recent conflicts in Syria continues to be the biggest reason for the increase in migrations. Abuses in Eritrea, ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as increasing poverty in Kosovo, are also making people to think about resettling elsewhere.

While on arrival, not all chose to claim asylum, but many do. For example, Germany received more than 476,000 applications, highest number of new asylum applications in 2015, but far more people have arrived in the country.

Subjugative Xenophobia in Europe:

Refugee crisis stand as one of the biggest problem European Union has ever faced. Xenophobia, an unreasonable fear or in this context hatred for foreigners, is on rise. Xenophobic groups around the Europe believe that taking refugees would result in the deterioration of “European Culture”. However, all of these misconceptions can be cleared out easily by proper interaction between the locals and refugees.

One of the main reason for the rise of this phenomenon is misconceptions about Islam. Most of the Europeans fear that Muslim refugees would forcefully convert them to Islam, and in the eye of some, it is a direct attack on “Judeo-Christian” civilization. All of these are based on three false canons:

- Islam is a very violent religion.
- Islam is not a European religion.
- Refugees are an invasive group.

To say that any religion is peaceful or violent is meaningless. A religion is only as violent as an individual following it, and the same goes for Islam, Christianity, Judaism, etc. We also need to understand that religions are not under the ownership of a particular geography, and are definitely not bound to national borders. Looking back, Islam was first introduced to European people in 711 AD, by Tariq ibn Ziyad, who crossed the straits of Gibraltar and conquered Iberian Peninsula.

The “bad side” of Islam is often fed by the actions of Muslim extremists, whether they be in Europe, or anywhere in the world. All of this can be and must be tackled with proper education and open dialogue.

The Calais Wall :

The UK government has announced that a four-meter (13 foot) high wall is to be constructed, in the French port city of Calais to prevent refugees and migrants from entering Britain. It is an attempt to enhance border security in Calais, home to a controversial makeshift camp known as "The Jungle," where thousands of displaced people live in squalid conditions. The camp is disreputable for being a major transit point for migrants, who often join onto the back of UK-bound cargo trucks in the hopes of entering the country illegally. Many in "The Jungle" are not willing to register as refugees in France because they would rather prefer to go to Britain.

In Calais between 6,900 and 9,000 migrants live in these filthy camps known as the "Jungle" which is the biggest slum in France. This is situated near the highway leading to the port, the migrants which come mainly from the Middle East and African nations - try to block the lorries on their way to the Channel tunnel or ferries so they can jump on board and hide inside to get across to Britain. In an attempt to counter these assaults alongside to further increase security along the borders this wall is being constructed.

However a counter narrative to this decision still exists as some elected officials, including Calais Mayor Natacha Bouchart, are doubtful about the construction of the wall. She believes there is no need for a wall because the French government has promised to close down the Jungle camp as soon as possible . Volunteers from the various charities helping the migrants in the camp of tents and makeshift shelters believe this project is useless and costly. More criticism come from the fact that, once this avenue for the refugees also closes then the migrants would most likely move to the nearby A16, another highway in the region defeating the entire purpose UK would like to achieve. Further contention also comes from the fact

that civilians believe that the money would have been better spent to help minors stuck in Calais to be reunited with their families hence they believe it is a poor use of tax payers' money.

The African Refugee Crisis:

There has been an increase of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons on the African continent caused by consistently occurring conflicts within and among the African nations. Contributing factors to this crisis involve the thirst of power by leaders who cling to power irrespective of election outcomes and battle for scarce resources. Many people are currently and unfortunately living as refugees in Africa without efficient resources and security. In today's age, as a result of numerous conflicts worldwide people are on the run. Therefore, more than 25.2 million people of whom are 10.55million refugees and 14.7 million IDPs and 12 million are stateless. Africa hosts over 5 million of the world's total refugee population of 15 million. The total number of displaced persons in Africa are over 12.7 million and more than two million returnees, who have still not been reintegrated in their respective country of origin and are still dependent on international protection and assistance. In Southern Africa there are over 340,000 persons who have come to the attention of UNHCR, that is approximately 146,000 refugees, 193,000 asylum-seekers and 700 returnees.

After the cold War Africa when through a period of constant conflicts, from inter-state to intra-state, where the communities within a state were constantly fighting over resources and power. There are several factors that have given rise to refugees in Africa – one of the major causes being political power struggle, lack of governance; thirst for power alongside slightly contributing is poverty. The causes are most often political, with military action being provoked by political tension or a political power struggle usually being the direct cause. Often displacements of populations in Africa are result of; political unrest, violence and suppression of fundamental Human rights. Mixed migratory movements towards Southern Africa from the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa continue to pose a significant challenge. These are refugees who move to the south looking for refuge as well as employment opportunities. This led to the establishment of refugee camps in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe which were used as temporary stopovers on their way to South Africa, putting a strain on scarce humanitarian resources and creating tensions within the camps. Alongside we should realize that the resolution of the longstanding conflicts in Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa which was experienced between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, the southern part of the continent has been transformed from a major to a relatively minor refugee-hosting area - Angola being the primary exception to this rule. However, according to UNHCR statistics, the three largest refugee exoduses of 1998 all took place in Africa: from Sierra Leone (280,000), Sudan (37,000) and Angola (33,000) as well as the largest deportation movements to two countries: to Liberia and Sierra Leone. This disturbing refugee population is rapidly increasing at the most crucial time. A time when the Continent is facing numerous dire problems- economic recovery, a reduction in external resources, the terrible debt and debt servicing burden, deteriorating terms of trade, collapse of commodity prices as well as the variability and the severity of climate with in the region.

Aspects a resolution should answer:

- Addressing the involvement of ISIS in the refugee crisis
- Solution to the Syrian Refugee Crisis
- Controlling Xenophobia in Europe
- How to rehabilitate and reintegrate these refugees and defeat the notion of Islamophobia
- Addressing the Calais Wall
- Dealing with other refugees crisis (African, and others discussed within the committee)

Bibliography

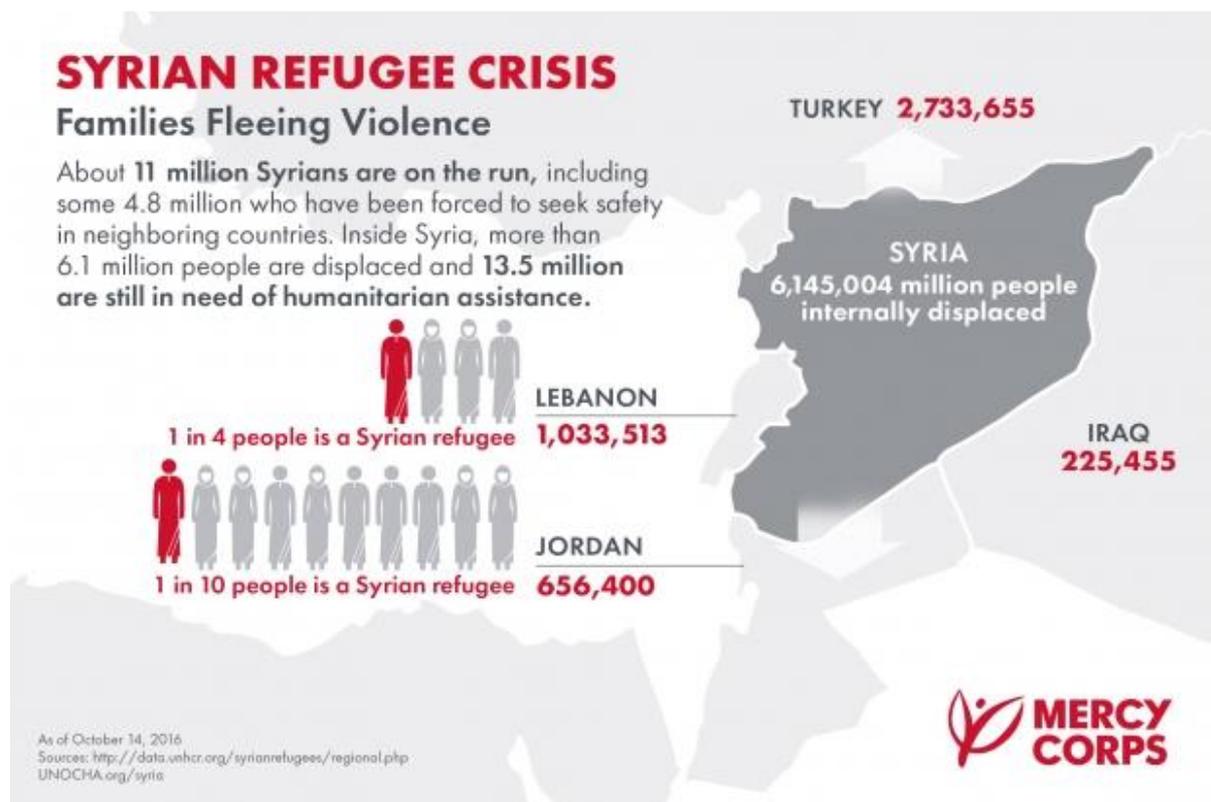
<http://journal.georgetown.edu/isis-and-the-civil-war-in-syria-the-challenge-for-u-s-foreign-policy/>

<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syria-refugee-crisis-faq-war-affecting-children>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

<https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>

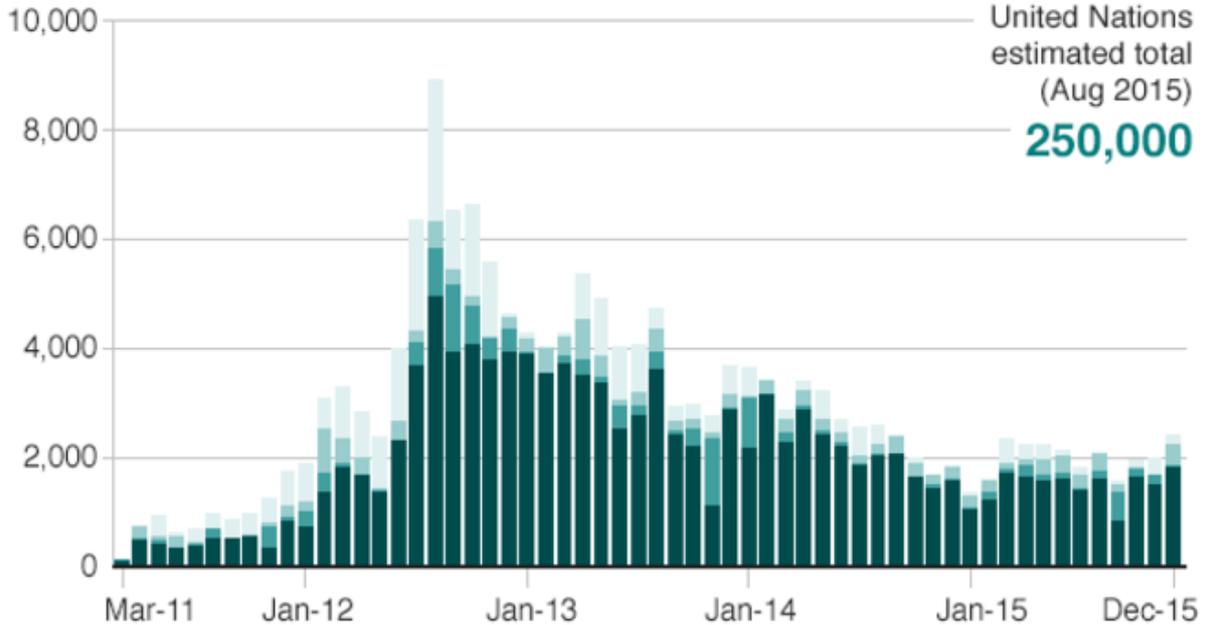
Resources/ Infographics



Syria conflict death toll

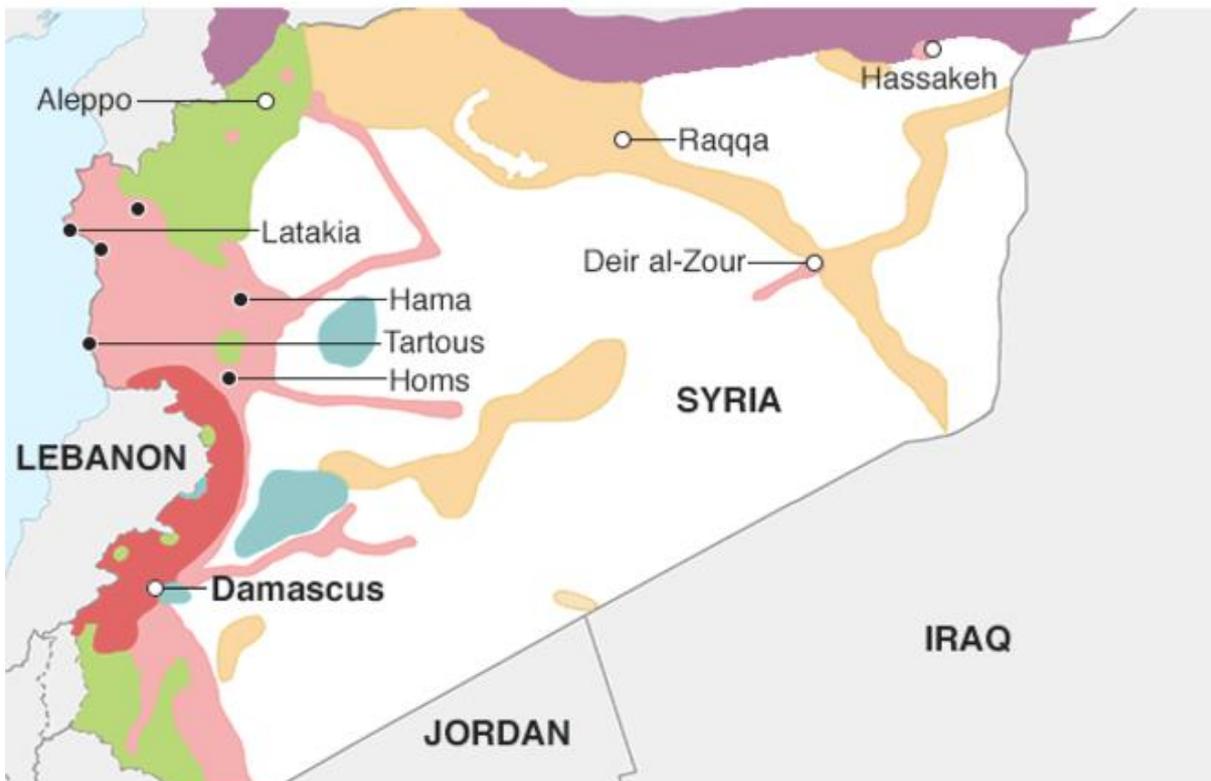
Documented killings per month

Number of sources for each killing



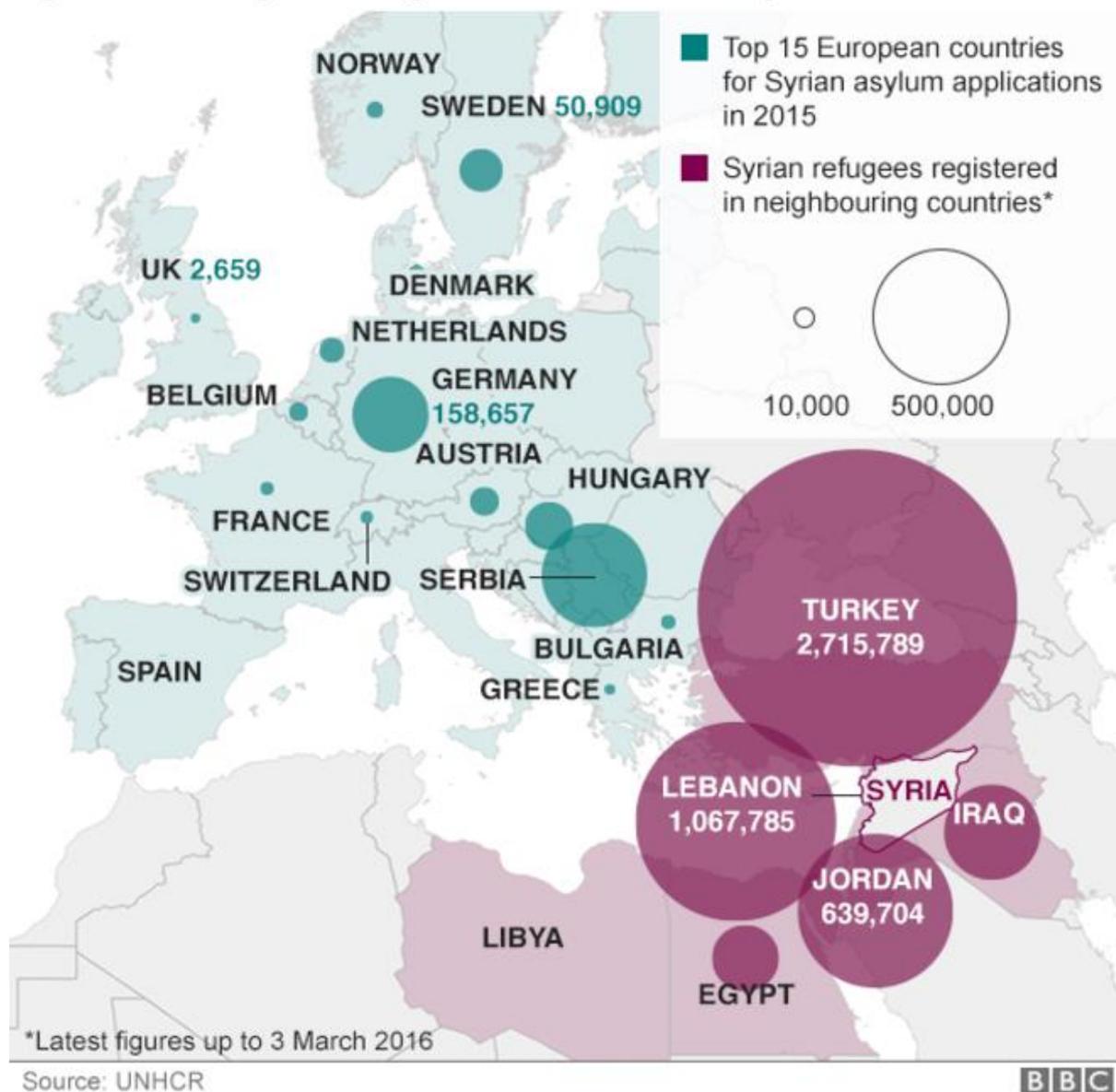
Sources: Violations Documentation Center, Syrian Shuhada, Syrian Network for Human Rights, Syrian Center for Statistics and Research

- Regime control
- Hezbollah presence
- Kurdish
- Russian presence
- Rebel control
- Islamic State (IS) control
- IS/ rebel contested



Source: ISW

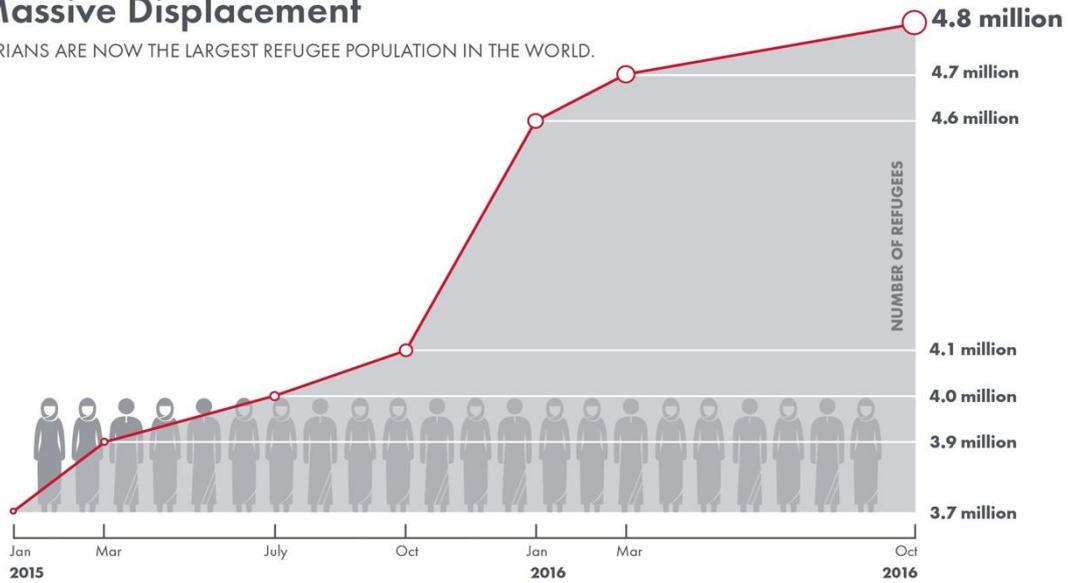
Syrians in neighbouring countries and Europe



SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

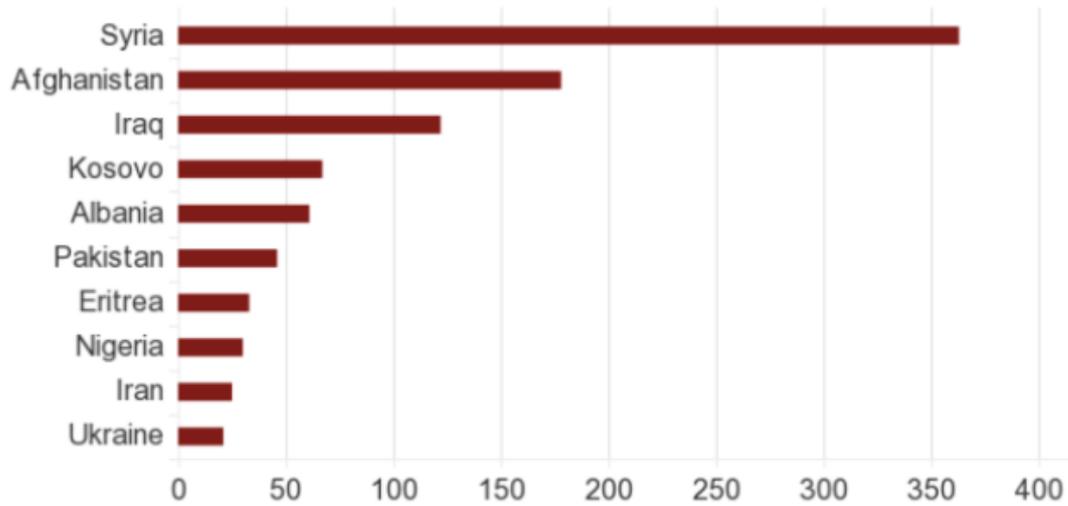
Massive Displacement

SYRIANS ARE NOW THE LARGEST REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE WORLD.



Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU

First-time applications in 2015, in thousands



Source: Eurostat

Asylum claims in Europe, 2015



Migrants detected entering the EU illegally, 2014-2015

