

Global Refugee Crisis and the UK's response – 30 Nov 2015

Globally we are now in the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

In the past three years the number of displaced people in the world has increased from just over 40 million to over 60 million, including over 20 million refugees.

In the same period the global number of asylum claims made each year has almost doubled, to 1.7 million in 2014. Of these 173,000 were made in Germany, 121,000 in USA and 88,000 in Turkey. The number of applications in UK has only gone up slightly, from around 25,000 to 31,000 in 2014.

And of course the latest official figures don't yet include people currently on the move, such as those recently admitted to Germany and Sweden, those stranded in the 'Jungle' in Calais, or those seen in media pictures of overcrowded boats, chaos at railway stations and a toddler drowned!

The main reason is the war in Syria. But there are still many of refugees coming from other countries.

Refugees, resettlement and relocation

The 'regular' route

Most people who gain refugee status in the UK are 'spontaneous arrivals' – they just arrive somehow and claim asylum. But arriving 'somehow' is actually not at all 'spontaneous' or 'regular' – it may be a combination of coming overland by lorry, walking, crossing the Mediterranean in unsafe boats, or flying with false papers. Once in the UK, however, anyone has the right to claim asylum.

Resettlement

Another, completely different, route is for someone in a refugee 'camp' in a neighbouring country to register a claim with the UN refugee agency UNHCR. If successful, they could be flown directly to a new home in one of the world's richer countries. In 2014 the total resettled like this was 105,000 including 70,000 resettled to the USA. (The UK has struggled to meet its agreed target of 750.)

In addition a new European scheme was agreed in 2013 for resettling Syrian refugees direct from camps such as those in Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan. Germany offered 30,000 places and other countries a few thousand each. After considerable pressure, the UK government set up its own scheme at the start of 2014, but only about 200 Syrian refugees came to UK this way in the first year. There is now a promise to resettle 20,000 over 5 years – still a much smaller number than those arriving by the 'regular' route or those resettled in other countries such as Germany. A few of these have already arrived in Scotland, and the government aims for over 1000 altogether before Christmas.

Relocation

In 2015 the number of refugees arriving in Europe has increased well beyond the figures quoted above. It passed 500,000 by September and some estimate it will reach 1 million by the year end. This puts enormous pressure on the countries where they arrive first, such as Italy, Greece, the Balkan states and Hungary, especially since by international agreement they should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. European countries are trying to agree a way of sharing out these numbers more fairly – i.e. *relocating* some of those who have reached southern Europe to northern European countries. So far the UK government has set its face against taking part, so this route does not exist for getting to UK.

The "Revolution of Generosity" – the British people offering help

Since the huge recent publicity given to refugees stranded in parts of Europe, large numbers of people in the UK have come forward to help, for example by offering a place in their home to a Syrian refugee. We hope some of this generosity can extend to other refugees and particularly to helping support those who are already here by the 'regular' route as well as those who have not yet arrived.