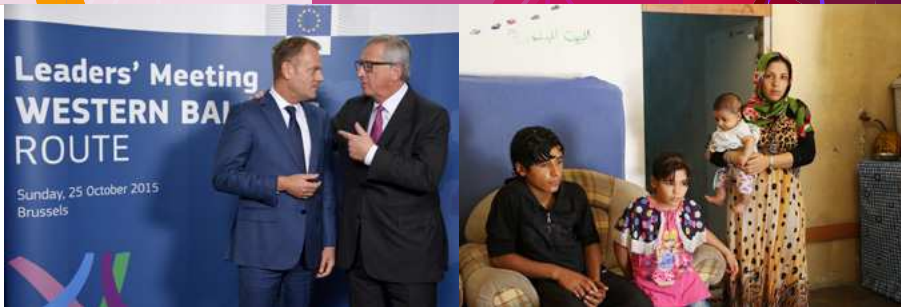


THE EU AND

→ THE REFUGEE CRISIS



In the last 2 years, Europe has experienced the greatest mass movement of people since the Second World War. More than 1 million refugees and migrants have arrived in the European Union, the large majority of them fleeing from war and terror in Syria and other troubled countries. The EU has agreed on a range of measures to deal with the crisis. These include trying to resolve the root causes of the crisis as

well as greatly increasing aid to people in need of humanitarian assistance both inside and outside the EU. Steps are being taken to relocate asylum seekers already in the EU, resettle people in need from neighbouring countries and return people who don't qualify for asylum. The EU is improving security at borders with a new border and coast guard, tackling people smuggling and offering safe ways for people to legally enter the EU.



WHAT IS THE REFUGEE CRISIS?

Many vulnerable people are coming to the EU to seek asylum. This is a form of international protection that is given to people fleeing their home countries and who can't return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. The EU has a legal and moral obligation to protect those in need. Member States are responsible for examining asylum applications and for deciding who will receive protection.

But not everyone coming to Europe needs protection. Many people leave their home country in an attempt to improve their lives. These people are often referred to as economic migrants, and if they are not successful in their asylum application then national governments have an obligation to remove them to their home country, or another safe country which they have passed through.

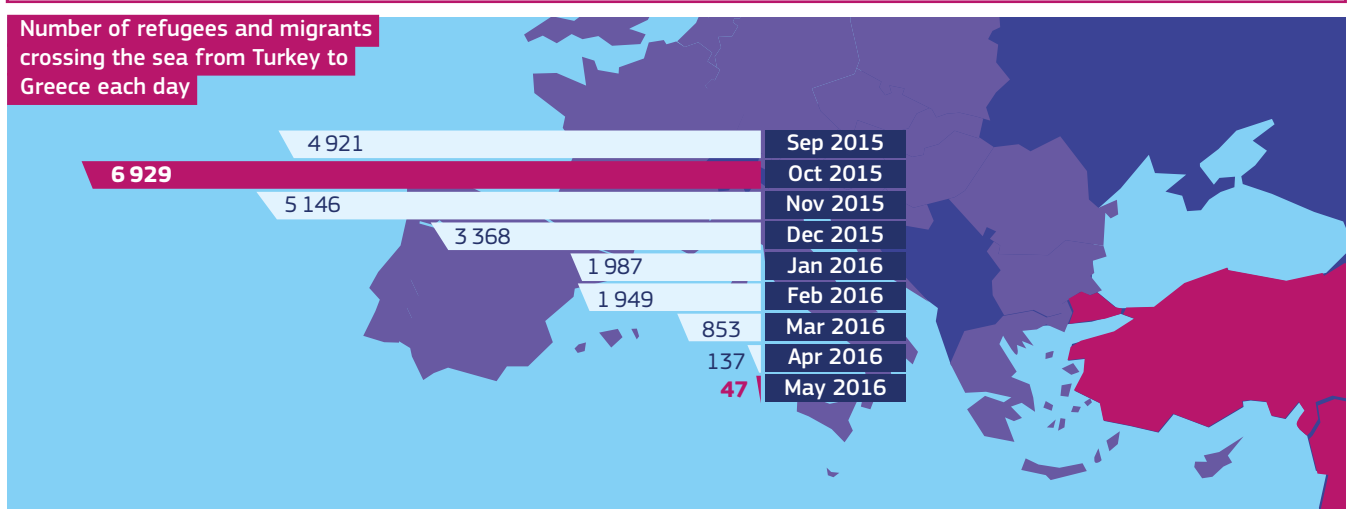
Thousands of people have died at sea attempting to reach the EU. Almost 90 % of the refugees and migrants have paid organised criminals and people smugglers to get them across borders. As a result, they are known as 'irregular' migrants — that is, they have not entered the EU through legal means.

Providing people with food, water and shelter is an enormous strain on the resources of some EU Member States. This is especially the case in Greece and Italy, where the vast majority of refugees and migrants

first arrive in the EU. Many of these people eventually want to reach other EU countries such as Germany or Sweden. This has caused problems too in Member States which migrants have been passing through in order to get to their final destination, for example Croatia, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia.

In a large part of the EU — the **Schengen** area — people are able to move freely without internal border controls, but the flow of refugees has caused some Member States to reinstate checks at their borders with other EU countries. Just as the arrival of migrants affects some Member States more than others, the number of asylum applications is not evenly spread among them. In 2015, 75 % of all asylum applications were registered in just five Member States (Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Austria and Italy).

The EU has recently reached an **agreement with Turkey** aimed at halting the uncontrolled flow of migrants across one of the major routes in the Aegean Sea. The agreement also provides legal ways for refugees to enter Europe. The numbers of refugees and migrants coming from Turkey have been significantly reduced as a result. From a peak of around 7 000 per day in October 2015, the average number arriving was brought down to 47 per day by the end of May 2016.



Source: DG Migration and Home Affairs.

WHAT IS THE EU DOING?

➔ Providing humanitarian assistance and development aid

In total, the EU has dedicated over €10 billion from the EU budget to dealing with the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016. Many people arrive in the EU needing basics such as clean water, food and shelter. The EU is financing projects to address the most urgent humanitarian needs of the 50 000 refugees and migrants hosted in Greece as of May 2016.

The EU also provides **humanitarian aid** to refugees and migrants in countries outside the EU, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Turkey hosts by far the biggest number of refugees — about 3 million in total, of whom 2.5 million are Syrian. In order to support refugees in Turkey, the EU and its Member States are providing €6 billion through a dedicated facility between 2016 and 2018.

➔ Saving lives at sea and protecting the EU's borders

The EU has increased its capacity to carry out search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and to tackle criminal networks. By tripling the available resources, it helped save over a quarter of a million lives in 2015.

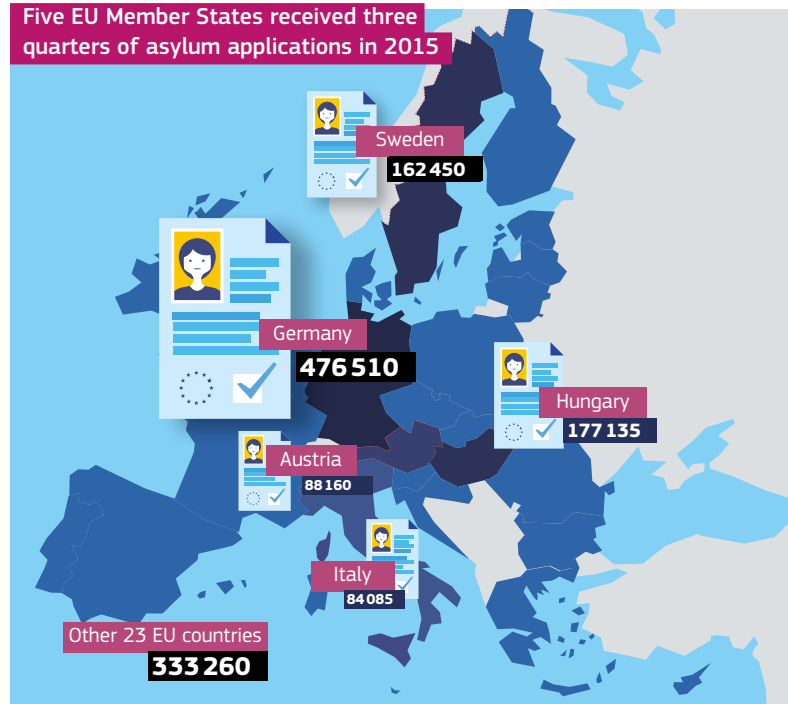
The EU Member States agreed in June 2016 to establish a new **European Border and Coast Guard** to reinforce the management and security of the EU's common external borders.

The **European Police Office** has opened a new **European Migrant Smuggling Centre** to support EU Member States in dismantling criminal networks involved in organised migrant smuggling.



The increased capacity of the EU's external border management helped save over 250 000 lives in 2015.

Five EU Member States received three quarters of asylum applications in 2015



Source: Eurostat.

➔ Relocation, resettlement and return

Based on a European Commission proposal, Member States have agreed for the first time to relocate 160 000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU countries by September 2017. However, as of July 2016, only 3 000 asylum seekers have been relocated. National governments need to step up the pace of this scheme to help those in need of protection.

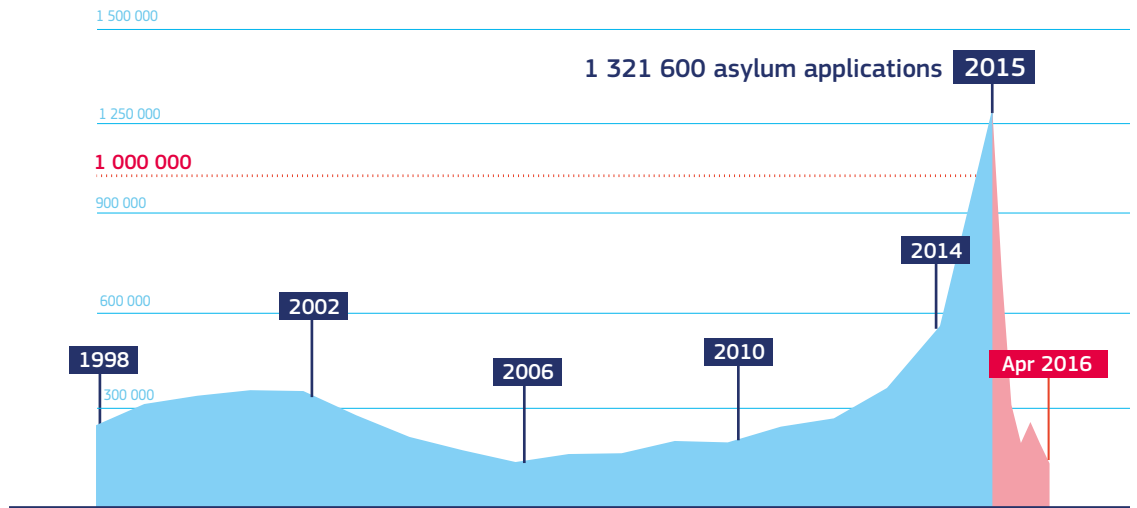
The EU also wants to create safe and legal ways for asylum seekers to enter the EU so that they don't have to risk their lives and life savings by turning to smugglers and traffickers. A **voluntary resettlement programme** agreed by the EU Member States envisages the transfer of 22 500 people from outside the EU to an EU Member State.

The EU has increased the rate of returns of irregular migrants with no right to stay in the EU to their home country. Member States have agreed to apply the rules on return more actively, and the EU border agency will assist them by coordinating return flights.

➔ Agreement with Turkey

The EU and Turkey **agreed** in March 2016 that irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving on the Greek islands from Turkey may be returned to Turkey. For every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands after an irregular crossing, the EU will take in a Syrian from Turkey who has not sought to make this journey in an irregular way. Return operations have started from the Greek islands to Turkey, in parallel with resettlement flights directly from Turkey to the EU Member States.

Evolution in the number of first-time asylum applications in the EU



Note: The 1998-2015 figures are annual. The 2016 figures are monthly.

Source: Eurostat.

➔ **Stopping irregular uncontrolled migration**

The EU has set up reception centres in Greece and Italy to help the authorities in these countries to manage the migration flows. It has also sent experts to help register people arriving and to coordinate the return of some migrants to their country of origin.

The EU will also look for **partnerships** with countries that refugees and migrants come from in order to save lives, increase returns, enable migrants and refugees to stay closer to home and, in the long term, help the development of those countries in order to address the root causes of irregular migration. The EU proposes to devote €8 billion to this programme in the period up to 2021.

➔ **Reforming EU rules on asylum**

Although the EU started to develop a **common asylum policy** in 1999, the rules were never designed to cope with a massive number of people arriving in a short space of time. **New proposals** are now on the table from the Commission to revise the existing laws in line with current and future needs. The basic principle will remain the same — people should apply for asylum in the first EU Member State they enter unless they have family elsewhere — but whenever a Member State is overwhelmed, there must be solidarity and a fair sharing of responsibility within the EU.

➔ **An interactive version of this publication, containing links to online content, is available in PDF and HTML format publications.europa.eu/factsheets/refugee-crisis/en**

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