

Refugee Crisis

- Sophie Mae Berman

Conflict in Syria, violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eritrea, and poverty in Kosovo continue, driving a massive surge of refugees into Europe. As families flee from destitution and violence, world leaders argue about policy; what should be done to solve this rapidly swelling global problem?

“Trembling in their house in the blasted-out Syrian city of Homs, Ahmad, his wife, his son and his daughter listened for the barrel of bombs. They had been falling on the neighborhood for three days with the frequency of raindrops... the conflict assumed a terrifying regularity. The buzz of a warplane. Then a deep, heavy thump as yet another structure in their corner of the city was blown to smithereens. And then there were the knocks on the door two houses down... a frenzy of violence. The neighbors were not strong enough to keep out the soldiers. The women in the house were raped before their throats were slit. The men were simply shot. Ahmad and his family took what they could carry and ran...” (Kingsbury).

In September, The Boston Globe and Wall Street Journal headlines were dominated by the global migration crisis of desperate families and children fleeing their native countries in fear of their lives, while clinging to the desperate hope of beginning new ones. Imagine the entire population of the state of Connecticut scrambling fearfully to save their lives, paying smugglers \$1800 per person to board rubber rafts that might lead to safety after traveling two hours across the sea. Huddled families, often propelling themselves with a single oar or “clawing at the sea with cupped hands” face this challenge daily, many drowning in the process. The massive population of the state of Connecticut would not quite equal the 4 MILLION refugees who have fled Syria alone since its civil war began in 2011, precipitated by peaceful prodemocracy protests. Half of Syria’s refugees crossed the Aegean Sea into Turkey, landing first on the island of Lesbos where 2,000 people still arrive daily (Sacchetti).

Masses of refugees and migrants are fleeing Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and other countries, with a total of approximately *60 million refugees worldwide*. As the largest European Union country, Germany has been a “top destination” for the massive swell of migrants. This week, Germany opted to establish temporary border controls by imposing document checks of people entering the country. This decision, a direct contradiction to the “cornerstone of European integration: open borders,” was implemented according to German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière as “a signal to Europe that the government will live up to its humanitarian responsibility. But the burden connected with the large number of refugees must be distributed in solidarity throughout Europe”(Troianovski/Thomas).

Although the United States has spent an enormous \$4 billion dollars in humanitarian aid to Syrians since their civil war began, only about 1500 Syrian immigrants have been allowed into the U.S. President Obama has requested that the U.S. accept 10,000 Syrian refugees. Republican Senator Lindsay Graham also supports the U.S. taking in immigrants, noting that our failure to do so would warrant “tearing down the Statue of Liberty because we don’t mean it anymore” (Kingsbury).

Not everyone agrees with these positions, however. Many take note of how poorly the United States treats its own veterans, our own debt, and our cuts in desperately needed domestic programs. *What do you think of the current worldwide migrant refugee crisis? What is our responsibility in the United States?*

European Union leaders seek a deal with Turkey to slow the flow of migrants by sea to Greece, yet a few countries are opposed to the recently formed agreement, such as Cyprus. Leaders of the European Union's 28 nations plan to meet in Brussels this week with the hopes of resolving the disagreements on a proposed pact with Turkey, established on March 7; the pact would permit Greece to return migrants to Turkey as Europe opens new ways for prescreened migrants to seek asylum legally. In return for agreement with this novel refugee pact, Turkey wishes to be part of the European Union. Amidst these negotiations, Cyprus lies divided with a Greek dominated south and a Turkish militarized north. With millions of refugees seeking immediate relief from physically threatening conditions, a resolution must be reached.