

Refugee Crisis Facts and Myths

How to answer the objections of pro-refugee friends and family



1. We have a duty to help those who flee war.

Answer: No war zone at the moment shares a border with the EU. Does our duty to help those who flee war also extend to those who have already been in safe areas, but chose to put themselves in harm's way to reach Europe using smugglers?

2. If we don't take the Syrians in, they are going to stay in Syria and die!

Answer: Again, most Syrians who reach Europe were already in Turkey, which is a peaceful country and welcomes Syrian refugees. Those who chose to come here were by no means under bombs and bullets before they came here, and could have stayed there and allowed the law to take its course and the UNHCR to resettle them in an orderly fashion.

3. But aren't these boat refugees the poorest of the poor that we have to take pity on and care for anyway?

Answer: The average boat refugee has paid somewhere between \$600 and \$20000 (depending on how far he has traveled and by which means) dollars per person to the criminal human traffickers and smugglers to get to the country of his choice in Europe.

People with that kind of money at their disposal in the Third World are not poor by any means and can have a relatively comfortable life in whatever Middle Eastern region that they live in, and don't need to come to us for help.

By contrast those refugees who are not leaving their camps in the Middle East and stay there patiently are the poorest ones, and they should be the object of our compassion. But now, unfortunately, because of this illegal influx of boat refugees, no time, money, or attention is left for us to devote to them, and this is indeed an unjust state of affairs that should have never been allowed to come about.

4. You mean we shouldn't care and we shouldn't help anybody?

Answer: Of course we don't mean that. But help should be given wisely and in an orderly fashion. We also have to make sure that we help the refugees in a way which would not destroy our financial ability to help our own people and other people in need as well.

If instead of allowing and even encouraging all refugees to take risky journeys on inflated boats to come here, we were to close the borders of the EU and concentrate our efforts on helping the refugees who are in camps in the Middle East, and provided them with bigger and better camps and financial help, we would be able to help a lot more people at a much lower cost. Not to mention that we would not run the risk of wasting our resources on people who are posing as refugees just in order to be able to live in Europe.

5. But Isn't this the biggest humanitarian crisis since WWII?

Answer: This crisis did not come about because the Syrian war is the bloodiest war since WWII or that more people are being killed or become homeless than ever before. As tragic and unfortunate as the Syrian civil war is, it is neither the first war that we have faced in the Middle East, nor the longest, nor the severest. And yet we never before had a flood of refugees into Europe like the one that we are experiencing today.

So what has happened? What has changed?

The truth is that the current crisis is not a humanitarian crisis, but a mismanagement crisis. It is because for the first time during a conflict the EU authorities have decided not enforce the regular EU border controls and have decided to allow whoever who claims to be a refugee to come and go as he pleases within the EU.

Also the statements issued by the German and Swedish governments a few months ago, which stated that they will receive hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, has prompted a mad rush and a stampede amongst the people in the Middle East and the Third World to get themselves as soon as possible to these two countries before they announce that their quota is filled.

6. The UN convention on war refugees which we have signed compels us to take all the Syrian refugees in without any border formalities or even personal documents.

Answer: Then UN convention only says those who are "prima face" refugees, meaning are observed by border guards crossing the border of a war zone to a peaceful zone, are to be granted passage without border formalities. Obviously if the guards see that a person is coming from a war area they know and can be sure that he is a real refugee. But that sort of certainty exists only when the refugee crosses the border of the war zone into a peaceful one.

As the law was interpreted until recently, a refugee who is already in a peaceful country should apply for a refugee registration with UNHCR in order for him to be officially recognised as a refugee.

Also, if he wanted to cross other borders between the peaceful country in which he resided and other countries he should have applied for a visa or should have waited for the UN to resettle him in a country that agreed to grant him asylum.

But now the law is being unreasonably misinterpreted as saying that a person CLAIMING to be a refugee, even with no papers to prove it, should be allowed to cross ANY border (not just the one between the war zone and a peaceful country) as long as the conflict lasts in his country. This reading of the law opens us up for much abuse and fraud. This is an unnecessary reading which is also unprecedented in the history, and has caused the stampede of the people of the Third World, claiming to be from Syria and other war zones without documents to prove it, into the EU and from there usually to a Northern European country of their choice. The law should be interpreted correctly in order for the lawless flow of refugees to stop.

7. It would be inhumane to send the refugees back to Syria in the midst of a war.

Answer: We don't have to send anybody back to Syria. The refugees didn't come from Syria, but from Turkey. The first thing that we have to do is prevent them from entering the EU zone. If we were to intercept the boats which are bringing refugees to Europe, and instead of towing them to Greece, tow them back to Turkey, the problem would be solved and the flood would stop.

8. But we have to take some Syrian refugees! After all there is a war going on there and we should care.

Answer: Yes, we should indeed. But we should go back to the lawful and orderly system that we used to have in the past when the refugees registered with the UNHCR as soon as they came out of the war zone, waited in a camp in the nearby region and some of them, according to the decision of each country, were resettled and distributed amongst different countries via UNHCR.

In addition to that, studies have shown that it is best for the refugees to be housed in humane and comfortable but temporary camps in the region of their homeland so that after the war ends they would have more incentive to go back to their homeland and rebuild it. This helps the post-war countries to recover much faster and decreases the risk of those countries reverting to conflict and a cycle of violence.

9. Isn't temporary settlement of refugees in temporary camps to wait for the end of the war inhumane? Shouldn't we bring them here and give them a permanent home here? After all it is cruel to make people put their lives on hold instead of starting a new life in a new country?

Answer: Moving to a far away country will also put the immigrant's life on hold for many year! First of all, the asylum process itself takes 1-4 years, during which the asylum-seeker's life will be on hold in the most nerve-wracking way.

Even after the asylum is granted, it takes many many years for an immigrant to settle in his new country and actually start his new life in earnest. Most of the time it takes a number of years for him to learn the new local language to a practical level and learn to navigate the new society. Not to mention that if he is sent too far from his homeland, the climate, the language, the culture and social customs and religion will be so different from what he is used to that he might never adapt and feel himself at home at all, and he might experience severe depression and alienation, or even get into conflict with the local society.

In comparison, nowadays wars usually end on average in 4-5 years. It is much easier for him to put his life on hold for those years somewhere near his home and then go back and participate in the crucial and important task of rebuilding his homeland, than to risk moving far away to a strange land.

War is a horrible tragedy and to go through a war without losing something is impossible. If one goes through a war by losing just a few years of his fully active life and nothing else, he should count himself lucky!

10. But now that the boat refugees are here anyway, shouldn't we welcome them with open arms and hearts?

Answer: The fact of the matter is that the boat refugees have chosen to take advantage of a bad situation in Syria and use their financial resources and EU authorities' lax border control to jump the queue and go over the heads of UNHCR and our approved refugee quotas, to force their way into our countries. Also, on their long march from Greece to Northern Europe often they have not shown considerate and peaceful behaviour, and have resorted to violence and disobedience towards the law enforcement officers in various countries who wanted to apply the law to them.

Many of the boat refugees have no documentation showing that they are who they say they are and that they really have come from a war zone. In such a lawless atmosphere it is obvious that many opportunists from the peaceful countries in the region have mixed themselves in with the ones coming from war zones, and we have no way to separate them from each other before a lengthy and costly authentication process takes its course.

Not to mention that their queue-jumping has completely drained our resources and disabled us from helping the refugees who are in desperate need and are waiting in the camps in the Middle East for our help.

Do you think that lawbreakers and queue jumpers should be rewarded with #RefugeesWelcome campaigns and an outpouring of love and welcoming sentiments, or that they should be rebuked and frowned upon? We citizens of civilised societies should in no way condone lawless behaviour and an abuse of our humanitarian system. In the end I must add that misguided kindness expressed in the #RefugeesWelcome campaign will encourage and embolden even more people to take their chances and journey to Europe without going through the necessary legal formalities. And that would be an unwelcome side effect of well-meaning but misguided gestures such as these.

11. Why should I care about this issue and speak against it? Why not go with the flow and avoid having people judge me as cruel and xenophobic?

Answer: Because first of all, we should care about the truth, and about exposing waste, fraud and abuse whether it comes from the authorities that allowed this lawless state of affairs to start and take hold, or from the people claiming to be refugees who have left peaceful countries in a mad dash for Europe without being in any kind of urgent need to be here.

We should not allow unscrupulous people to take advantage of our goodwill and strong-arm us into giving in to their unreasonable demands. Nor should we let our governments off the hook for creating such a mess in our midst!

Conclusion:

In addition the drain that this lawless chaos has caused for us, it will also eat into our valuable and very limited resources to achieve the following important and necessary things:

1. Take care of our own needy and vulnerable citizens who should be our first priority.
2. Help the real refugees who are registered with UNHCR and would really benefit from our attention and financial help.
3. Contribute to Syria's rebuilding once the war is over.
4. Help any other country in need.
5. Find a way to sort out EU's financial crisis that has plagued Greece and Italy and many other EU nations.
6. Preserve the freedom of movement within the EU zone as per the Schengen Accord.
7. Avoid raising taxes or cutting benefits for the citizens of European countries who now have to finance this "refugee crisis".
8. Prevent our streets and neighbourhoods from becoming the roaming place for people whose backgrounds are not checked and whose identities cannot be established, and who could be criminals.
9. Protect our countries from possible terrorist infiltration and attacks.
10. Preserve our cultural integrity and social cohesion.

I hope these ten reasons will seem urgent and important enough to you to prompt you to speak up and become active and to overcome the fear of being labeled and judged as a "racist" or "xenophobe"!

In the past our forefathers risked life and limb to hand this magnificent continent to us. What is weathering the storm of some unjust criticism and finger-pointing from the scoffers, in comparison to their sacrifices? Those who would chastise and label us today will thank us tomorrow for saving our countries from a total disaster.