

Center for American Progress



TENT



# Crisis in Context

## The Global Refugee Problem

---

By John Norris and Annie Malknecht

September 2015

# Introduction and summary

The scenes from the daily news have been compelling and often horrific: a child lying dead in the surf; massive camps in the desert as large as cities; refugees herded behind barbed wire and huddled in train stations. The statistics on refugees have been equally alarming. Every day in 2014, the world averaged 42,500 new refugees and internally displaced people, or IDPs<sup>1</sup>—people who were forced from their homes but have not crossed an international border. In June 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, announced that global forced displacement, the combined total of both refugees and IDPs, topped 50 million people for the first time since World War II.<sup>2</sup> This total is now close to 60 million and still rising.<sup>3</sup> Half of these refugees are under 18 years of age.<sup>4</sup>

This report attempts to place the current global refugee problem within a clearer context to allow for better informed policy decisions by all involved. There should be no mistake: The current refugee crisis is international and cannot be viewed as merely a European or Middle Eastern problem. This report places particular emphasis on Syrian refugees and IDPs, since they are the largest force shifting the overall numbers in recent years. That said, it is important to stress that resolving the concerns surrounding refugees and IDPs from any country demands a nuanced view of the situation on the ground and an effective understanding of the complexities surrounding forced displacement.

Close to 60 million people are displaced worldwide currently, with the majority of them internally displaced, rather than refugees. In addition, a relatively few number of countries produce a very high percentage of this global displacement. The large number of people on the move reflects a fundamental failure to achieve a durable peace or to address the eroding security situations forcing people into hazardous flight from their homes.

The international response to the current forced displacement crisis has been deeply uneven, and this report proposes a series of recommendations to help address it.

Key Gulf states—including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia—should loosen work permit restrictions for Syrian refugees, ramp up their humanitarian giving, and move to become signatories to the U.N. refugee convention. The international community should also develop a better concerted and more robust position to end the horrific and widespread use of barrel bomb attacks in Syria, which are a prime factor in driving people from their homes.

In order to make it easier for refugees to seek asylum, the European Union should establish an outpost in Izmir, Turkey, to process refugees before they attempt the hazardous journey to the Greek Islands and beyond. Also, the Dublin Regulation should be altered to better reflect the proportions and urgency of the present crisis by allowing more flexibility for asylum seekers.

U.N. member states should hold an emergency special session to address the displacement crisis. The United Nations, in conjunction with private sector partners, should explore how best to integrate new refugee populations with an emphasis on improved livelihoods for refugees and their surrounding communities.

Finally, the United States must increase its efforts to help with this humanitarian crisis, including sharing a greater burden of accepting refugees. There are many convenient excuses for inaction or doing too little, but this is no time to shirk the responsibility of our common humanity.

---

## Our Mission

The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

## Our Values

As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

## Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

## Center for American Progress



---

Tent.org works to enable direct aid, effect policy changes, compel awareness, and implement strategies for over 50 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. We actively collaborate with humanitarian organizations and governments across the world.

The word "TENT" is written in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, centered within a solid black rectangular box.

TENT