

# The Failure To Tackle The Root Causes Of The Migrant Crisis

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The citizens of more and more European countries are waking up to find entire migrant families at their door demanding food, clothes, shelter, help – anything. First, Italy and Greece confronted the maelstrom. Then the Balkans and half a dozen more, Hungary, Germany, Austria, France, Britain and Sweden. Now most of Europe is affected by this huge movement of people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and elsewhere.

There have been endless meetings among the EU states on how to cope with the crisis, how many refugees each country should or could let in – on Wednesday, Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission president, [confirmed plans for a quota system](#). Yet still there is a failure to deal with the root causes of the wars that are fuelling this crisis.

The war in Syria has gone on for some five years, with 250,000 dead, 4m fled abroad and 8m displaced internally. That in Iraq has lasted even longer – certainly since 2003. The Afghanistan conflict is now largely forgotten but there has been fighting continuously since 1978 and it has just entered a particularly vicious stage. According to some television news reports, Afghans constitute the third largest group of refugees after Iraq and Syria.

Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon have taken in an estimated total of 3.8m refugees from Syria and Iraq, [according to the UN](#) and their fragile economies are collapsing under the burden. This is a long-term problem that could be destabilising for the region and beyond.

The interconnections are clear. The migrant crisis is linked directly to the countries at war, either involved in a civil war or trying to defeat the extremism of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (also known as Isis) or the Taliban. The economic meltdown in these countries is forcing people to pack up and leave.

The obvious next step for the international community is to provide help and financial aid on a much greater scale and set in motion stronger and more meaningful diplomatic efforts to bring these conflicts to an end.

Syria is now the world's biggest source of refugees but efforts have been missing recently to try to bring about a diplomatic solution – getting the backers of President Bashar al-Assad, such as Iran and Russia, to meet the supporters of those trying to oust him, such as the Saudis and Gulf states.

At this critical moment there has been a huge cut back in donations and spending on refugees, [António Guterres](#), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, told the Washington Post. The UN is receiving less than half the amount it has asked for over the past four years to care for Syria's refugees. The UNHCR and the World Food Programme are cutting staff and key projects linked to the crisis because of a lack of funding. Non-governmental organisations, which should be the mainstay of relief efforts, are being [overwhelmingly underfunded](#).

If people continue to arrive in Europe in such numbers – this year so far 160,000 people in Greece alone, a country that can hardly provide for its own economic needs – there could be a backlash. The barbed wire fence that Hungary has erected on its border may be copied by others – Bulgaria is already building a 100-mile fence on its border with Turkey. Germany's announcement that it would give temporary residency to all Syrian refugees arriving in the country has created a domestic crisis for Chancellor Angela Merkel. Some European countries may be laying out welcome mats now but in the months ahead local public opposition and tensions are likely to grow.

Beyond the European crisis, millions of refugees left behind in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon are in desperate poverty; with no access to schooling, their children will provide easy fodder for groups such as Isis. Expect a massive recruitment drive by Islamic extremists among migrant groups. Refugees also tend to become permanent. After 35 years, Pakistan is still hosting more than 2.5m Afghans, many of whom claim Pakistani identity to avoid having to return to their home country. Some of those young Afghan men arriving in Europe are from second- or third-generation refugee families. The UNHCR warns that there are now more than 50m displaced people in the world – the largest number since the end of the second world war.

The diplomatic efforts of governments trying to end the wars in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere are pitiful. Diplomacy, negotiating with your enemy, has become almost a dirty word, as US Republican congressmen have shown in reaction to the recent US deal with Iran. There is a desperate need for world leaders to cut through the red tape and get serious about trying to resolve the global mess, rather than spending their time trying to mitigate the consequences.