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**World Affairs**



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[**Europe's Refugee Opportunity**](http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/europe-refugees-plan-by-emma-bonino-2015-12)

ROME – Europe’s so-called refugee crisis should never have become an emergency. Accommodating one million asylum-seekers should not be a huge challenge for the European Union – an area with 500 million citizens that welcomes more than three million immigrants every year. Unfortunately, the lack of a coordinated response is transforming a manageable problem into an acute political crisis – one that, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel has rightly warned, could destroy the EU.

Most EU member states are selfishly focusing on their own interests. This pits them against one another and has precipitated panic, putting refugees in even greater peril. A smart, comprehensive plan would calm the fears. Instead, Europe has preferred to search for scapegoats – and Greece is the latest to be targeted for blame.

Greece has been accused of not doing enough to process and house refugees. And yet, even if the country were not crippled by economic crisis, it would be unreasonable to expect a single small country to bear the burden alone – especially in a year when more than 800,000 refugees are expected to pass through its territory. This is a European and global problem, not solely a Greek problem.

There is plenty of blame to go around. In Greece, George Soros’s Open Society Foundations, acting in partnership with European Economic Area and Norway Grants, anticipated the problems that the lack of a serious European asylum policy would create. In 2013, the partnership established an organization, Solidarity Now, run by the cream of Greek civil society. Solidarity Now needs just €62 million ($67 million) to care for 15,000 of the 50,000 refugees who need to be housed in Greece next year. And yet, though the EU has promised to spend €500 million to help Greece manage the crisis, some member states have failed to pay their share.

In addition to supporting Greece, the EU needs a comprehensive plan for managing the arrival of asylum-seekers in a safe, orderly way. That means operating beyond Europe’s borders, as, from the donors’ perspective, it is much less disruptive and expensive to maintain asylum-seekers close to their present locations.

For starters, the EU should commit to absorbing at least 500,000 asylum-seekers a year, while working to convince the rest of the world to accept an equal number. A public commitment of this magnitude should help calm the disorderly scramble for Europe. Asylum-seekers provided with a clear status and promises of safety could be induced to wait in Turkey and other frontline countries, rather than risk a dangerous Mediterranean crossing.

Second, formal gateways should be established, first in Turkey, and then in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. Gateway countries would establish, in close cooperation with the United Nations Refugee Agency and the EU, processing centers to register asylum-seekers and assess their applications. Accepted asylum-seekers would then be placed in a queue and required to remain in the gateway country until an EU country accepts them. A safe, deliberate process of vetting refugees would quell security concerns in the aftermath of the Paris attacks.

Gateway countries would have to improve reception, asylum, and integration standards. In exchange, these countries should be helped financially and provided with other incentives – for example, easier access to the EU for their citizens. Indeed, the EU should establish or expand programs that allow entry to non-asylum-seekers.

Third, political, financial, and technical support must be provided to frontline countries. Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, which have borne most of the burden of the crisis, host more than four million Syrian refugees. Turkey [says](http://www.euronews.com/2015/10/05/eu-asks-turkey-s-erdogan-for-help-with-refugee-influx/) it has spent $7.8 billion to care for more than two million refugees; thus far, it has received only $415 million from others (though the EU has promised another €3 billion).

Full support for refugees in frontline countries is [estimated](https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/rebuilding-refugee-asylum-system-by-george-soros-2015-09) to cost at least €20 billion per year. The EU should commit at least half of this, with the balance coming from the rest of the international community. Special economic zones that benefit from preferred trade status with the EU and the United States should be created, in order to generate investment, economic opportunities, and jobs for refugees and locals alike. These zones should be established in both frontline and transit countries.

Fourth, the EU needs a truly common asylum and border-guard system. The patchwork of 28 separate asylum systems is expensive and inefficient, and it produces wildly uneven results in terms of the reception, status determination, and integration of new arrivals. The EU should establish a single European Border Guard and a single Asylum and Migration Agency.

Fifth, a global response to the crisis, coordinated by the UN, must accompany the EU’s plan. This would distribute the responsibility for addressing the refugee crisis over a larger number of states, while helping establish global standards for dealing with the challenge of forced migration.

Finally, to finance the plan, the EU could use its AAA borrowing capacity to issue long-term bonds. The burden of servicing the bonds would be assigned to member states in inverse proportion to the number of asylum-seekers they accept. Those countries that can successfully integrate refugees would reap an economic advantage; already, the German economy is growing significantly faster as a result of its willingness to accept Syrian refugees.

The ongoing exodus from Syria and other war-torn countries was long in the making, easy to foresee, and eminently manageable. Fear-mongering nativists are taking advantage of the lack of a coordinated response to peddle a vision that runs counter to the values upon which the EU was built. Their vision, if realized, would violate European law; already, it threatens to divide and destroy the EU. For this reason, it is all the more urgent that the EU backs a comprehensive strategy to end the panic and stop the unnecessary human suffering.

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