

European values and the Syrian exodus: EU, Armenia and the neighbours' response

15 October 2015



Table of contents

Table of contents	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction and Background	3
Conflict in Syria	3
International and European regulations on refugees	4
European response	4
Germany	5
Sweden	5
Armenia	6
Regional response	8
Turkey	8
Lebanon	9
Jordan	10
European aid	10
Conclusions and Recommendations	11
Annexes	12
Graph 1	12
Graph 2	13
Graph 3	13
Graph 4	14
References	1.4



Executive Summary

The unprecedented wave of refugees in Europe is at the origin of the biggest migration crisis since the end of the World War II. Most of the refugees come from Syria, where the civilian population tries to escape the civil war and the threat of ISIS. The majority fleeing the conflict stays in neighbouring countries (like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan), which are largely dependent on international support in dealing with this phenomenon. However, worsening conditions in settlement camps, as well as lack of appropriate legislative measures in these countries force more and more Syrians to continue their trip in the hope of reaching Europe. This situation has caused great controversy in the EU. The discussions turned into bargaining over refugee quotas by some member states which in the eyes of parts of the public opinion undermined the principles at the heart of the EU.

Germany and Sweden are the two countries with the highest number of Syrian refugees. Unbeknownst to many, Armenia is the third European country with the largest refugee population on its soil. However, taking into account this small South Caucasus republic's socio-economic situation, it quickly becomes clear that it bears a significantly bigger effort than any other country in Europe.

Finally, only a well-coordinated response of the international community and all stakeholders involved can relieve the devastating effects of this humanitarian crisis in a sustained manner.

Introduction and Background

Conflict in Syria

Europe is currently facing an exceptional wave of migration coming from its southern border. It is the worst exodus crisis since the end of World War II. The images of refugees desperately trying to cross through Hungary to reach other European countries have been reprinted on the cover of newspapers across the world. The tragedy of the crisis became symbolically represented by the picture of a dead 3-year-old Syrian boy Aylan, washed ashore on the Turkish coast.

The majority of the migrants come from war-torn Syria. Since the 70's, the country is governed by the Al-Assad dynasty. The Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East in 2011 turned in this country into a brutal conflict that resembles a civil war. On the other hand, during the summer of 2014, an Islamist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has profited from the conflict and seized large territories in Syria and Iraq with the goal of building a totalitarian caliphate, further deepening the humanitarian crisis in the country. As a result, the civilian population of Syria found itself trapped between the regime, the rebel groups, and religious extremists. Consequently, one third of the Syrian population (around 8 million people) became internally displaced. In addition, according to official sources, over 4.3 million fled the country. Those who want to reach the EU often travel via Greece, with the flow steadily on the rise – official data provided by Eurostat shows that the number of Syrian asylum applicants rose dramatically from 50 000 in 2013 to almost 123 000 in 2014.

While key international stakeholders are trying to find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict – including at the September 2015 UN General Assembly in New York – the issue of refugees is pressing and has to be dealt with immediately. In 2015 alone, over half a million people have crossed European borders to seek asylum. Most want to reach Germany or Sweden but what comes as a surprise to many is that Armenia is actually the third European country with most registered displaced people from Syria. Its policy of open arms stands in stark contrast with the response of several EU member states, which bargain over immigrant relocation quotas and are delaying implementation of agreed-upon European



response, taken at the informal Council meeting of 23 September. In addition, some EU countries openly contest the agreement and the EU policy on the matter. For example, Slovakia has filed a legal suite in the European Court of Justice against it.

It is therefore important to understand how the countries most affected by the migrant influx are dealing with this question, what legislative measures they have undertaken, and what international aid is at their disposal.

In the following pages, you will find an a descriptive analysis on the three European countries with most registered Syrian refugees, namely Germany, Sweden, and Armenia, as well as three neighbours of Syria involved in this crisis: Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

International and European regulations on refugees

The international act defining the status and rights of refugees and framing international response to humanitarian crises is the 1951 Refugee Convention. As it concerned refugees hailing from Europe after the Second World War, an additional Protocol was signed in 1967 to extend its geographical scope beyond European asylum seekers and now covers the whole world. So far, the Convention has been ratified by 147 countries and the Protocol by 146 – notably, Jordan and Lebanon are not signatories of either of the acts. In addition, though Turkey has signed the convention, it has retained its original geographical limitations (of Europe-originating refugees) and therefore today does not grant Syrians the right to stay on its soil under legal denomination of refugees.

On the EU level, refugee matters are managed under the Dublin regulation. Apart from defining the member states' responsibilities, the most relevant point is that asylum seekers should apply for protection in the first EU country they reach, to prevent multiple applications in different EU countries. The law puts a particularly big burden on border states such as Italy, Greece and Hungary, who had difficulties to cope with the number of refugees reaching their borders. Most notably, Germany has announced suspending the regulation's application and thus allowing refugees to claim asylum on its soil.

European response

For several years, Syria has been the main country of citizenship of asylum applicants. Out of the 122 800 Syrians who applied for asylum in the EU in 2014, around 60% were registered in two Member States: Germany (41 100) and Sweden (30 800). Syrians also represented the main citizenship of asylum seekers in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania and Slovenia. While this paper concentrates on the issue of Syrian refugees, and especially those granted legal status in their respective hosting countries, it should be again underlined that the current wave of refugees is of course ethnically and nationally more diverse, and the numbers often quoted in the media refer to arrivals, without specifying the migrants status.

To address the refugee crisis, the Council of the European Union convened on 23 September and finally decided to relocate 120 000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy into other EU member states participating in the relocation mechanism, together with a €6000 contribution for each accepted refugee coming from the EU budget.

Even though an agreement was finally reached (though it continues to be contested), this situation has been a hard test for the European Union as a project based on people's solidarity and European values. Some observers that followed the Council discussions tend to conclude that further consistency with EU values and principles would have been welcome.



Germany

Germany has become the country hosting the most asylum seekers and registered refugees. The federal government has estimated at 800 000 the numbers of arrivals to be reached this year. Despite the exceptional border checks introduced on 13 September, the flow of refugees has not stopped and the current number of registered Syrian refugees is over 66 000.

Syrians are granted special refugee status, allowing them to claim asylum in Germany, even if, according to the Dublin regulation, their application should be processed in the first EU country they reached.

Accepted asylum seekers are permitted to stay in Germany for three years – after this period, they can apply for an unrestricted residence permit if the situation in their home country has not improved. After registration, Germany allocates refugees among its 16 regions according to socio-economic indicators. Because of the large number of migrants, several regions have lowered their requirements for refugee shelters. For example, lacking proper housing facilities, the authorities in Hamburg have passed a law allowing the local government to repurpose abandoned buildings for refugee accommodation even against the will of their owners.

Generally speaking, Germany sees the migrant flow as an opportunity that could help its economy. Therefore, the government wants to integrate refugees into the labour market at an early stage. This is why the government is opening up its integration courses run by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees to asylum seekers and those with tolerated residence status that have good prospects of being allowed to stay in Germany. They are offered free language classes and after successfully completing a training course, are given a two-year work permit.

In addition, a special body called the Training Alliance was created, to coordinate efforts among all involved actors. It is composed of the German government, leading business associations, trade unions, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Federal Education Ministry and Federal Employment Association.

Apart from government aid, private donors and companies are also offering help – for example, Bayern Munich, the country's richest football club, will donate €1m to cover refugees' basic needs.

However, despite the initial welcoming policy, the federal government has started to introduce changes meant to stem the migration flow, because of the growing unease among the population and the financial strain put on local governments. At the end of September, the German government adopted legislation changing its migration policy. The new rules will cut cash benefits paid to asylum seekers, speed up the review of asylum applications, and deter migrants from the Western Balkans (largely seen as economic migrants rather than asylum seekers) from coming to the country, while facilitating integration of registered refugees into Germany's social and economic tissues.

To meet the logistical aspects of the crisis, the government will spend an additional €6 billion on professional trainings, language classes, requalification, and building 130 000 new apartments. The federal government will transfer a lump sum of €670 per asylum seeker per month, to cover the costs incurred by the regions. It will also replace cash handouts to refugees with vouchers for food, clothes and housing. All these changes were finalised in September and are expected to be passed by the German federal parliament in October.

Sweden

Sweden has implemented one of the most generous and comprehensive immigration policy in the world. Regardless of the current migration crisis, each year Sweden welcomes a defined quota of refugees. In 2014, its rate of accepted refugees was 3.13 immigrants per 1000 inhabitants, a number ten times higher than the EU-28 average of 0.32. The chances of obtaining refugee status remain very high: the



percentage of positive rulings regarding asylum applications in 2014 was 77%, while the EU average remains at 45%.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that already in 2013, taking into consideration the situation in Syria with no solution in sight, the Swedish government has decided to grant all Syrian refugees an automatic permanent residency status. The current number of accepted Syrian refugees is estimated to be over 40 000.

When the refugees arrive in Sweden, they are welcomed at one of the country's arrival centres, where they receive permanent residence permits and accommodation in one of Sweden's municipalities (over half of them receive refugees based on a country-level distribution quota). Thanks to family reunification programmes, once a refugee is granted a permanent residence permit, his/her immediate family may request to join him/her in Sweden.

Seeking a better managed integration system, in 2010 the responsibility for coordinating all integration related programmes was transferred from individual municipalities to the Ministry of Employment. Currently, to facilitate integration, a special introduction programme (of up to 40 hours/week) has been devised by the Ministry of Employment together with municipalities. It includes language classes, social orientation courses and employment support, as well as a monthly living allowance of around €600. To increase their mobility and integration, refugees are also given free bus passes.

In addition to a generous policy towards Syrian refugees in the country, Sweden is also providing considerable financial support to international programmes working on the ground in Syria. Since the conflict started in 2011, Sweden has contributed more than €160 million, and is one of the largest donors to the two main international stakeholders managing the humanitarian crisis in Syria, namely the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Armenia

Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, Armenia has accepted around 17 000 refugees, which in absolute terms makes it the third European country with the biggest number of refugees from Syria. In relative terms, compared to its population as well as the GDP per capita (which is over 10 times lower than the EU average), Armenia is by far the first European country leading the effort in hosting Syrians. Armenia welcomes almost 6 newcomers per 1000 inhabitants, compared with 4 in Sweden and just 1 in Germany.

It is noteworthy that the first immigration wave into Armenia was triggered by the war in Syria and the flux has not only continued but intensified since attacks by ISIS have started.

The Armenian administration was quick to recognise the seriousness of the Syrian crisis and moved to pass appropriate legislation. Already since January 2011, it has adopted 12 legal acts related to newcomers. In addition, one law regarding state tax and containing provisions on visas was unanimously amended by the Armenian parliament. An English-language guidebook for the refugees was published by the Foreign Ministry, to facilitate access to information about applicable procedures. Armenia's approach to the plight of refugees stands in stark contrast with many EU member states. The Armenian Diaspora Minister clearly stated "If they [refugees] decide to come to Armenia, our state must do its best by means of joint efforts with international structures and different Armenian organisations to receive them."

State Migration Service operating under the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations is engaged in hosting refugees and migrants coming to Armenia. There are no prescribed "welcome centres" in Armenia as such.



An innovative "Adopt-a-Family" project matches newcomers with Armenian hosts who offer emotional and psychological support and help them in their integration into social, legal and cultural life of Armenia. Currently, almost 100 families are covered by the project. To overcome the language barrier, refugees can participate in free language classes (in Armenian, English and other languages). Since 2014, legal aid and counselling was given to over 6000 newcomers, to help them with legal procedures,

Also as of 2014, a wide range of emergency assistance and integration projects were introduced, serving vulnerable displaced families with focus on children, women, elderly and people with special needs, such as a rental subsidy scheme (which covered 850 families). Emergency cash assistance was made available to over 1500 qualifying families, with the amount of up to 80 000 Armenian drams per month (around €150, the average Armenian salary is €325). Additional support is also provided, in the form of food distribution (around 820 vulnerable families) and humanitarian assistance such as clothing and hygienic packages (1000 people). So far, over 4000 refugees have benefitted from free healthcare, medication and psychological support. Rental apartment programmes, initiated by non-government organisations, may cover the monthly apartment rent.

Free educational support is at the disposal of all refugees, and currently over 5000 young refugees are attending Armenian public educational institutions. Children can also participate in free cultural events and programmes, mostly organised in Yerevan.

Refugees from Syria are also opening their own businesses in Armenia, registering so far 245 business start-ups, of which 92 benefited from a micro-credit scheme thanks to funds provided by the Armenian government and UNHCR. Recently, refugees from Syria were included in a programme offering six-month paid internships in private companies in Armenia as a result of a tripartite partnership between the Armenian representations of UNDP, UNHCR and the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA). Many trainings, such as computer literacy, social entrepreneurship, tour guides trainings or vocational education are open to the migrants as well. However, Armenia's economy and labour market cannot easily absorb such a large influx of labour force, as it is already struggling with an unemployment rate of 17%, according to the World Bank.

Generally speaking and thanks to simplified procedures, the legal framework for immigrants offers three protection options. Depending on the circumstances and characteristics of those who are looking for shelter in the Republic of Armenia, immigrants can obtain the Armenian citizenship or a residence permit, or else apply for an accelerated asylum procedure. It should be noted that Syrian refugees coming to Armenia are primarily of Armenian origin, as Syria was home to around 80 000 ethnic Armenians, in most part descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide. However, other minorities can also find refuge in Armenia – for example, members of the Yazidi religious minority fleeing Syria and Iraq to escape persecution by ISIS were also granted legal status as refugees (furthermore, the Yazidis in Iraq will also benefit from an additional \$100 000 from Armenia).

Thanks to the abovementioned simplified procedures, 15000 Syrian Armenians have chosen to acquire Armenian citizenship and therefore benefit from the full protection under the Armenian law. So far the refugee status was granted to 630 applicants.

Lastly, Armenia is one of the few European countries with an operating embassy in Syria's capital Damascus, where security concerns pushed most European countries to close down their diplomatic missions in 2012. Armenia's consulate in Aleppo (where a sizable part of the Syrian Armenian community is based) also remains open despite continuous bombardments of the city.



Regional response

The great majority of Syrian refugees (around 95%) are currently located in Syria's neighbouring countries. Turkey hosts over 1.9mln, Lebanon 1.2mln, Jordan 650 000, Iraq 250 000, and Egypt 130 000. The regional answer is organised under the UN-led Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which brings together strategies developed jointly by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The 3RP integrates and aligns itself with existing and emerging national policies, including the Jordan Response Plan 2015 to the Syria Crisis, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, the Iraq Strategic Response Plan (SRP), and country refugee policies in Turkey and Egypt. All activities are designed in support of the priorities of national governments with a strategy adapted to the respective country context.

Turkey

Turkey plays a key role in the Syrian refugee crisis. Almost half of all of Syrian refugees are registered on its territory – as of 12 September 2015, the number is 1.905 million people. In addition, Turkey is the first step on the shortest possible migration route to Europe, being geographically the closest to the EU. Because of the distance from the Turkish coast to the main Greek islands varies between 8 km and 25 km, it therefore remains a key transit point. The 900-km-long border with Syria and the visa-free regime between the two countries are also contributing factors to the current situation. The volume of asylum seekers in Greece this year alone have reached 290 000, which again shows the role of Turkey in the crisis and the popularity of this migration route among asylum seekers.

In addition to the sheer number of refugees, the internal situation of Turkey, with its upcoming parliamentary elections and the escalation of the Kurdish problem, reduces the chances of having a sustained solution to the refugee crisis.

Although Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Additional Protocol, it has limited its geographical scope to European refugees. Current Turkish legislation makes it difficult for refugees to be granted a legal status in the country, which also acts as an incentive in trying to reach the EU. Since 2013, several legal acts were adopted to help cope with the realities on the ground. Thanks to this new legislation, Syrian refugees receive a temporary protection framework, which provides access to free healthcare, education, psychological, social support, and work rights in defined sectors of the Turkish labour market. Refugees residing in camps have access to free education, including classes taught in Turkish and Arabic.

Current legislation, however, precludes them from permanent settlement in the country unless they are Turkish descendants, which grants them the right to acquire Turkish nationality under the "Settlement Law".

There are currently 22 refugee camps situated in the southern part of the country, close to the Syrian border, although only about 10% of the 2 million refugees in Turkey are hosted there. The majority are finding shelter on their own, and finance their stay with their own resources. According to the Turkish Ministry of Interior, Syrians have dispersed to 72 of the 81 Turkish provinces. Istanbul alone hosts 330 000 Syrians.

Better-off Syrians are setting up companies in all parts of Turkey. In the first half of 2015, of 2395 companies set up with foreign capital in the country, 750 belonged to Syrians. Syrian businesses generally operate in the food, construction, textiles, shoemaking, real estate, travel agencies, and logistics sectors. On the other hand, high local unemployment lowers wages and working standards, fuelling hostility between the local population and migrants. With 6 million jobless Turks, many Syrians who are employed



by Turkish companies work under difficult conditions. In addition, cases of child labour have been reported.

For a long time, Turkey has refused any international help and has chosen to take full responsibility for funding and managing the flow of refugees. This is a significant financial burden – by early 2015, the financial costs already reached \$5billion. The lack of compliance with the EU rules on eligibility for support is the reason why Turkey has not received the relevant assistance from the EU over the past years. Already in 2011, the Turkish government announced that it would only accept EU assistance in the form of blank checks or donations.

However, given the magnitude of the crisis, Turkey has recently changed its approach, and will be able to benefit from the additional €1 billion mobilised by the EU member states at the informal Council meeting of 23 September. It will also receive €17.5 million to improve access to education and provide psychosocial support to more than 200 000 Syrian children, through the European Union Trust Fund, a new element within the regional strategy to combat the ISIS threat. In addition, six new refugee camps for up to 2 million people are to be set up, partly financed by the EU.

Lebanon

Lebanon, a small country (with a size comparable to Cyprus) and population of less than 5 million, hosts over 1 million Syrian refugees, which represents a staggering 20% of its own population. Not surprisingly, public services are overwhelmed. In this country, where there are only two camps hosting together 62 000 Syrians, some refugees live in sub-standard shelter such as garages, tents, and informal camps. According to UNHCR, over 80% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon rent their accommodation, paying an average rent of \$200, for what is sometimes a simple plot of land.

Lebanon is largely dependent on international help in dealing with the crisis. For example, the EU's humanitarian funding covers shelter assistance for over 110 000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, and enables the provision of basic services to Syrian refugees such as food aid, clean water, sanitation, health services and protection.

In 2014, Lebanon has provided, among others, core relief items to over half a million Syrians, food vouchers to almost a million of them, as well as polio and measles vaccines to Syrian children. Free education up to grade nine is also offered to all children – Lebanese and non-Lebanese – in public schools this year. The initiative aims to reach 166 667 Lebanese and 200 000 non-Lebanese vulnerable children. In addition, this year the government and the international community are launching a pilot Accelerated Learning Program, to help Syrian children who have been out of school for over two years to catch up in an intensive program of four months.

However, refugees are not granted any legal access to the labour market. As a result some of them take up low-paying menial jobs on the black market to simply be able to support themselves financially, which also creates additional tension with local population which struggles with high unemployment. Over the past year Lebanon has put into place complicated rules that require Syrians either to pledge not to work or to find Lebanese sponsors under the so-called kafala system.

As part of the future approach to the crisis, Lebanon, the UN and international NGOs have jointly developed the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-2016, a \$2.14 billion programme that addresses not only the issue of Syrian refugees, but also Lebanon's own disenfranchised population (estimated at 2.9 million). It comprises an important humanitarian assistance aspect and represents the main channel through which the international community can support Lebanon's efforts in helping both Syrian refugees as well as its own people. The short-term humanitarian response focuses on the Syrian refugees,



336 000 vulnerable Lebanese, 50 000 Lebanese returnees from Syria, as well as 315 000 Palestinian refugees. The Plan's medium- and long-term support is extended to an additional 1.1 million Lebanese.

Jordan

Jordan, with a population of less than 7 million, is host to over 600 000 Syrian exiles, in addition to an estimated 800 000 Syrians that were living in the country before the crisis. Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention; however the government refers to Syrians as refugees. There are only two refugee camps in the country where around 20% of migrants stay. The others live in urban areas in the north of the country.

Jordan has put in place several controversial policies regarding the refugees. Its border with Syria was closed in March 2015 due to serious security concerns, leaving one crossing point open. Refugees already in the country are also facing restrictions in accessing health, education services, and food assistance. Due to budget shortages, the World Food Programme announced the suspension of all food assistance to refugees living outside the camps. As a result, an increasing number of refugees are returning to the camps (now estimated at 2000 per month) or even going back to Syria, outnumbering the amount of arrivals.

With an unemployment rate of 12%, the government is protective of its labour market and reluctant in opening it to refugees. Syrians are required to follow the same work permit application procedures as other foreign nationals, which involves the difficult and expensive process of finding an employer to sponsor them under the so-called kafala system. So far, only 4000 have obtained work permits. As a result, many are working illegally. Even though international aid projects involving refugees that include vocational training, income-generation or cash-for-work components have been proposed, they have not been implemented due to slow procedures of the Jordanian administration.

Jordan is granting Syrian children residing in host communities free access to primary and secondary education in public-run schools. However, the influx of refugees has added to the already existing pressure and overcrowding in many Jordanian schools, forcing many of them to introduce double shifts. Since the Syrian children are often put on the second shift, they do not benefit from the same quality and attention as the rest of the pupils. In addition, there are no reliable transportation options for Syrians living outside the camps to get to school and some have to travel considerable distances.

The government-developed Jordan Response Plan for the Syrian Crisis is part of the above-mentioned Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP). It covers, among others, education, shelter, and social protection issues. However, the Plan does not address the most pressing matter of work permits for refugees.

European aid

The European Union and its Member States are collectively leading the international response to the crisis and are the largest donor. More than €4.2 billion have been mobilised for relief and recovery assistance to Syrians in their country and to refugees and their host communities in neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

This effort is complemented by the EU's Regional Trust Fund (Madad Fund) with an initial budget of €40 million, and now boosted with an additional €500 million from the EU budget, matched by EU countries and other donors. The informal meeting of EU heads of state or government on migration held on 23 September resulted in several decisions, including also additional funding of €1 billion to the countries in the region. However, as these decisions were taken with a qualified majority (instead of the usual



unanimity), they are openly contested by some member states. As already mentioned, Slovakia is challenging the decision at the ECJ.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is clear that both the sheer magnitude of the migration crisis as well as its wide geographical scope require a response from all affected parties that is coordinated and focuses on long-term, durable solutions. Several recommendations could therefore be put forward:

- Coordinate assistance and response from all actors involved: international organisations, humanitarian NGOs, governments in the region as well as other host countries in wider Europe. A synchronized action will help transform the type of assistance provided to refugees from an emergency ad-hoc response to more durable and long-term solutions. Effective and swiftly ensured protection of refugees facilitates their integration into host countries and minimises longterm costs.
- Enhance the role of existing partnerships in managing the crisis, such as the Prague Process, which is an initiative promoting migration partnerships and information exchange between the European Union, Eastern Partnership countries, Western Balkans, Russia and Turkey and Central Asian states.
- Countries like Armenia, which so far are financing the migration needs from their own budgets, could apply for additional assistance through available channels, for example from the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Even though it was created by the EU, any country in the world can request support from this mechanism; recently it was used to tackle the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa. In fact, the mechanism was also already used in the refugee crisis this year, by EU (Hungary) and non-EU countries (Serbia) alike. In addition, new financial support tools should be made available to the affected countries in order to better manage the exiles arrivals.
- **Promote self-reliance among refugees** (by providing language classes combined with vocational trainings, diploma recognition, micro-credits, legal access to labour market), which reduces long-term costs for the governments and promotes economic growth, by allowing migrants to integrate into the social and economic tissues of their host country.
- Increase international financial support for the countries in the region that bear the biggest refugee burden. Improving living conditions in Syria's neighbouring countries lessens incentives to attempt the often dangerous trips to seek refuge elsewhere. This in turn reduces the danger of unnecessary loss of lives incurred in continuing the trips and eliminates the often lethal people trafficking industry. Finally, as part of a long-term solution to the conflict, refugees settled in neighbouring countries are also more likely to return.
- EU member states should consider agreeing on **one common list of "Safe countries of origin"** (one was already proposed by the European Commission on 9 September 2015). A common approach and EU-wide definition of a "safe country" would help expedite reviewing asylum applications. Moreover, including Armenia in this list, as France and Bulgaria already do in their national lists, would widen the possibilities for the EU to support the integration of Syrian Armenian refugees in Armenia.
- This exodus represents a good opportunity for the EU to reaffirm its commitment to its core values, starting with solidarity, and as such reinforce and emphasize the principles behind the European Union project. The slogan "united in diversity" can reach its true meaning if this crisis is managed successfully.



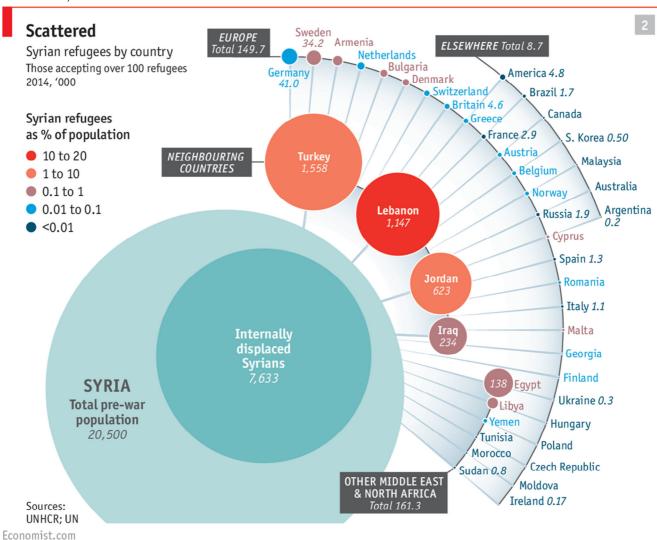
• Last but not least, **promote a political solution to the conflict**. The sooner the situation in Syria stabilises, the sooner the flow of migration will stop, allowing refugees and displaced people to return to their homes.

To conclude, the refugee crisis is understandably also a very emotional issue, and unfortunately not always has the moral and legal duty of helping those in need been reflected in policies and discussions at the European level. It is all the more inspiring and noteworthy that Armenia is in the forefront of showing solidarity, true to its European values.

Annexes

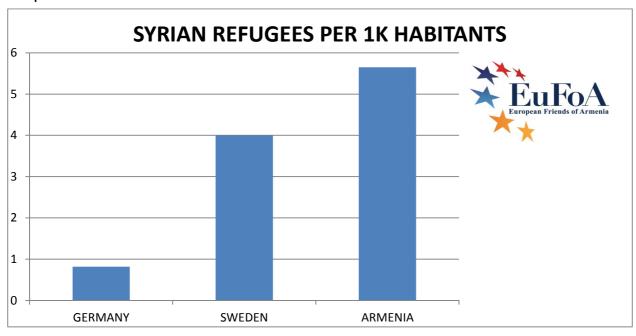
Graph 1

Armenia is the third European country with the biggest Syrian refugee population. (Source: The Economist)

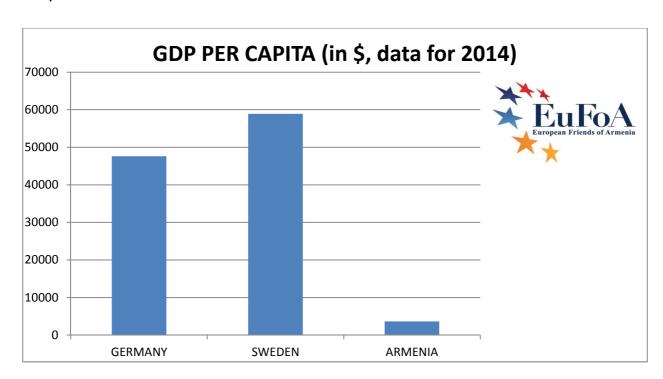




Graph 2



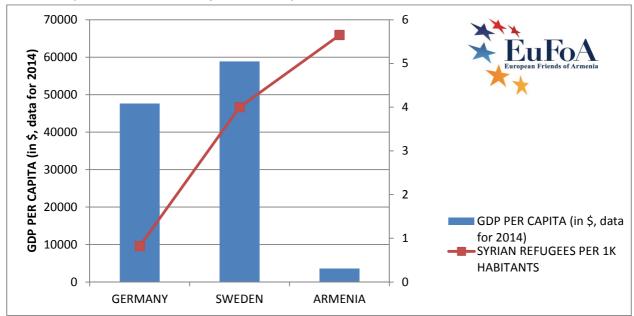
Graph 3





Graph 4

Compared to its GDP per capita, Armenia hosts disproportionately more refugees than other European countries. (Data source: Eurostat, World Bank)



References

Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mfa.am/en/

European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection: Syrian crisis:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf

Eurostat Asylum Statistic: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics

German Federal Government: http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/EN/Homepage/ node.html

German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy: http://www.bmwi.de/EN/root.html

German Federal Ministry of Education and Research: https://www.bmbf.de/en/

German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: http://www.bamf.de/EN/Startseite/startseite-node.html

Government of Sweden: http://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/

International Monetary Fund: http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan: http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/

Swedish Migratory Agency: www.migrationsverket.se

Swedish Ministry of Employment: http://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-employment/ Syrian Refugees (a common project by European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced

Studies and Migration Policy Centre): http://syrianrefugees.eu/

United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (United Nations CERF), Grants: http://www.unocha.org/cerf/cerf-worldwide/allocations-country/2015

UNHCR, Donor Countries: http://www.unhcr.org/558a639f9.html

UNHCR, Syrian Refugee Response: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Syrian Regional Response Plan, Financial Tracking Service: https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=1090

World Bank: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD

World Food Programme, Syria Emergency: https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria