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**DO YOU THINK THAT DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA ARE PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES**

A refugee, generally speaking, is a displaced person who has been forced to cross national boundaries and who cannot return home safely. Such a person may be called an asylum seeker until granted refugee status by the contracting state or the UNHCR if they formally make a claim for asylum.

REFUGEES IN NORTH AMERICA

For decades, North America has primarily constituted a sub-region of destination for migration flows rather than one of origin. Many of these flows originate from Mesoamerica, especially from Mexico. Meanwhile, Mesoamerica and the Caribbean are principally considered sub-regions of migrant origin and transit. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that the countries of each sub-region vary greatly in their degrees of prosperity, internal conflict, security, capacities of authorities to manage migration and vulnerability to natural disasters. Furthermore, the composition of migratory flows varies significantly among these countries. Consequently, the migration phenomenon is interpreted in diverse forms across the countries of each sub-region, as it poses particular opportunities and challenges to each one of them.

Despite the differences among countries of the region, in all of them, migrants, in particular children, women, indigenous people, temporary workers and domestic workers, extra-continental migrants, LGBTI migrants, migrants with disabilities and migrants who were victims of crimes, present varying degrees of vulnerability. Specific migrant vulnerability becomes evident when available data is analyzed. For example, according to United States data, in 2007, 41 per cent of trafficking victims in that country were nationals of Latin America and the Caribbean. Another characteristic shared by migration flows in all countries of the region is the high incidence of immigrants in irregular situations. Irregular migrants are more vulnerable to discrimination, abuse, extortion, kidnapping, human trafficking, sexual violence, and other crimes.

The United States continues to be the main country of destination for migrants in the world. The number of African immigrants in the United States has more than doubled during the last 10 years, reaching about 2 million. Meanwhile, migration flows from developing Asian countries to the United States and Canada continue to increase steadily. Similarly, migration flows from most Central American and from many Caribbean countries to the United States have continued to rise steadily since 2011. A good portion of these flows are irregular. In fact, around 40 per cent of all irregular migrants in the United States, or an estimated 6 million, were born in either Central America or the Caribbean.

A particularly alarming irregular migration trend, which has grown recently in the United States, is made up of immigrant children, especially unaccompanied, originating principally from Mesoamerica. On the other hand, the growth rate of migratory flows originating from Mexico to the United States has steadily decreased in comparison to the previous decade. Still, Mexico continues to be the principal country of origin for immigrants entering the United States and the principal migrant country of origin in the world. The United States is also the main destination country worldwide for immigrants originating from developed countries (North-North migration). In fact, the United States is part of the first, third, fourth and fifth most important North-North migration corridors in the world. In decreasing order, Germany, Canada, the Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom, are the principal migrant countries of origin that make up these corridors.

Under the Trump administration, the refugee admissions ceiling has suffered dramatic cuts. For fiscal year 2019, the administration has set the refugee admissions ceiling at 30,000, the lowest in the nearly 40-year history of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The total number of refugees actually admitted in fiscal year 2018 is even lower: Only about 22,500 refugees were admitted, the lowest number in more than a decade and only half of that year’s targeted 45,000 admissions. In short, even though the global need to resettle refugees is expected to rise 17 percent from 2018 to 2019, the United States will not be stepping up to the call—it will be stepping back.

By undermining the refugee system, the Trump administration is disregarding two fundamental truths about this nation. First, for years, the United States has been a world leader in welcoming people who have fled violence and persecution and are seeking a safe place to call home. Since the USRAP was established in 1980, most administrations until now—regardless of political party—have paid heed to the global need for resettlement, thoughtfully calibrating the yearly admissions ceiling in consultation with Congress to cement the U.S. commitment. Second, U.S. communities have long benefited from the arrival of refugees each year. Refugees have unique stories and typically humble beginnings. Once they are resettled, they learn the new language, adjust to the different culture, and strive to establish a new life. But in the process, they also enrich and bring cultural vibrancy and diversity to their local communities.

This issue brief gives an overview of refugee arrivals and ceilings in the past two decades. It then presents the results from a nationally representative annual refugee survey, which provide a glimpse into the lives of refugees who arrived in the United States from fiscal years 2011 through 2015. The brief highlights the steps that newly resettled refugees are taking to rebuild their lives from scratch. It also shows how they have made notable advancements in just a few years. By lowering the ceiling on refugee admissions, the United States is breaking the tradition of giving hope, safety, and stability to refugees and is likely to miss out on many highly motivated and resilient individuals in the coming years.

REFUGEES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

According to the UNHCR, the EU countries with the biggest numbers of recognized refugees at the end of 2014 were France (252,264), Germany (216,973), Sweden (142,207) and the United Kingdom (117,161). No European state was among the top ten refugee-hosting countries in the world.

Despite arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers decreasing to pre-2015 levels, the often- opportunistic hardline approach of anti-immigrant European Union governments, including those of Italy, Hungary, and Austria, dominated the migration debate throughout the year.

With disagreements blocking agreements on reforms of EU asylum laws and fair distribution of responsibility for processing migrants and asylum seekers entering and already present in EU territory, the focus remained on keeping migrants and asylum seekers away from the EU, including through problematic proposals for offshore processing and migration cooperation with non-EU countries with fewer resources, uneven human rights records, and less capacity to process asylum claims.

By mid-November, 107,900 arrivals were registered by sea (the vast majority) and over land, compared to 172,300 in 2017. A combination of factors, including the EU’s problematic migration cooperation with Libya and curbs on nongovernmental rescue efforts in the central Mediterranean, led to a marked decrease in arrivals to Italy, while crossings from Turkey to Greek islands and from Morocco to Spain increased.

The EU consolidated its partnership on migration control with Libya despite overwhelming evidence of brutality against migrants and asylum seekers there. Support to the Libyan Coast Guard, combined with the International Maritime Organization’s recognition, in June, of a Libyan search-and-rescue zone, meant that increased numbers of people were intercepted at sea and subsequently detained in abusive conditions in Libya.

A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) program to evacuate vulnerable asylum seekers from Libya to Niger did not receive sufficient resettlement offers from EU countries. In September, UNHCR updated its non-return advisory for Libya, emphasizing that Libya is not a safe place to disembark rescued persons.

EU member states’ efforts to obstruct rescue efforts by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the increasing reliance on Libyan coast guard forces coincided with a skyrocketing death rate. By mid-November, the death toll had reached 2,043, a decrease compared to 2017. But the death rate per crossing increased from 1 in 42 in 2017 in the first eight months to 1 in 18 in the same period in 2018, according to UNHCR.

In early June, Italy began refusing or delaying disembarkation of rescued persons from NGO, commercial, and military ships. With Malta following suit, there were numerous incidents when hundreds of people had to remain aboard rescue ships until ad hoc disembarkation agreements could be reached. There were concerns that the actions could deter merchant vessels from carrying out rescues.

Instead of seeking a regional disembarkation agreement to ensure a fair and predictable system for sharing responsibility among EU countries, European leaders focused on creating so-called disembarkation platforms outside the EU where all rescued persons would be taken for processing of asylum claims. Egypt, Tunisia, and other North Africa states, and Albania were proposed as possible partners despite concerns about conditions, treatment, and meaningful access to asylum. Proposed reforms to EU asylum laws, put forward in May 2016, remained largely blocked. Changes to the EU Dublin regulation needed to ensure a more equitable distribution of responsibility for asylum processing remained the most contested.

Belgium moved forward with plans to resume family immigration detention, completing the construction of new detention units for migrant families with children in mid-2018. It had abandoned immigration detention of children, whether unaccompanied or with families, in early 2016. EU countries do not systematically report data on immigration detention of children, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights observed in a 2017 study. Elsewhere in the EU, 16 of the 28 member states held children in immigration detention in 2016, the last year for which complete data are available.

Populist extremist parties and ideas again exercised an outsize influence over European politics during the year. Parties aligned with radical right populism won re-election in Hungary, joined ruling coalitions in Italy and Austria, and gained ground in elections in Sweden and Slovenia, and in state elections in Germany. Poland’s populist government remained in power, but lost momentum in local elections in 2018. Elements of the populists’ anti-immigration, anti-refugee and anti-Muslim policy agenda continued to be embraced by some mainstream political parties in several EU countries, including in Germany.

Danish authorities introduced a series of measures during the year to enforce “Danish values,” designating certain areas as “ghettos” based on a high proportion of residents with ethnic minority or immigrant backgrounds, and low social status. Children in those areas would be subject to mandatory daycare in the name of integration. In August, a ban on wearing face veils in public came into effect.

There were instances of racist intolerance or violent hate crimes in many EU states including Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Anti-Semitism remained a concern in EU member states.

An April report by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency noted that Roma across the EU commonly faced harassment and experienced discrimination in accessing education, employment, and healthcare.

The European Commission launched a consultation to develop standards on disability inclusion in EU-funded humanitarian operations.

Discrimination on the grounds of gender and sex remained widespread. At time of writing, eight member states and the EU had yet to ratify the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty on combatting and preventing violence against women. In July, Bulgaria’s constitutional court found the treaty incompatible with its constitution.

In Ireland, a referendum in May overturned a near-total abortion ban, and in December parliament finalized approval of legislation legalizing access to abortion was pending before parliament. In Poland, a bill introduced in January to “stop abortion” was still pending at time of writing. The initiative aimed to restrict legal abortions carried out in situations of severe fetal anomaly, the grounds for over 95 percent of legal abortions performed in Poland. In June, the EU Court of Justice ruled that the same-sex spouses of EU citizens are entitled to free movement to any member state in the EU, even if the member state’s marriage laws (in this case Romania) did not authorize same-sex marriages.

The asylum crisis in the West

Concern is widespread about the strains and pressures involved in granting asylum to large numbers of people. The most systematic debate on this subject is taking place within the European Community (EC) which, although it still hosts a relatively small proportion of the world’s refugee population, has seen a sharp increase in the number of people seeking asylum in recent years. Wider consultations, including European states not members of the EC as well as Australia, the United States and Canada, are taking place on issues of common concern.

During the 1970s, the average number of asylum-seekers arriving in Western Europe was around 30,000 a year. By the end of the 1980s, the annual figure had climbed to more than 300,000. In 1992 it surpassed 680,000. For a region that had seen the last of its post-World War II refugee camps closed in 1960, and had not experienced a mass influx of refugees since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the numbers were sufficiently disturbing to set off a major public debate. Germany has been the most seriously affected by the sharp increase, with the number of asylum-seekers rising from 121,000 in 1989 to 438,000 in 1992.

Moreover, the surge in asylum applications coincided with the strains, both social and economic, of German reunification.

In conclusion, reality is that a state will always put the interests of it’s citizens first before others such as that of refugees, therefore despite the challenges faced by refugees in these countries, it is evident that effort has been made to protect theses venerable refugees by North America and Europe.