



## OXFAM BRIEFING

### 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016

# Too small a welcome from the world's wealthy

*The six wealthiest nations host less than nine percent of the world's refugees while poorer countries shoulder most of the responsibility. The world's richest countries can and should do much more to help the world's most vulnerable people who have fled their homes because of violence and conflict.*

## Background

*The number of people forced to flee their homes due to war, violence or persecution is at its highest level since records began. The conflict in Syria has been a major factor in this increase, but people have also fled other conflicts including in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. In total, more than 65 million people have fled their homes – 40.8 million within their own country, 21.3 million as refugees and 3.2 million awaiting asylum decisions in industrialised countries.*

*The responsibility for providing refugees with shelter, food and health care, as well as jobs and education, is falling disproportionately on poorer countries, which are often struggling to meet the needs of their own people or are at risk of compromising their own stability.*

*The world's six richest countries, which make up more than half the global economy, host just 8.88 per cent of the world's refugees and asylum seekers. Among these countries Germany alone hosts over 736,000 people while the US, UK, France, China and Japan are hosting the remainder of the 2.1 million between them.*

*In sharp contrast, half the world's refugees and asylum seekers – almost 12 million people - are hosted by Jordan, Turkey, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pakistan, Lebanon and South Africa whose economies collectively account for less than 1.5 percent of the world's total.*

*Those who are forced to flee often face treacherous journeys before they reach a safe haven. Families are ripped apart and many end up living in squalid conditions with not enough food, clean water or proper sanitation. Some people spend decades as refugees with no prospect of formal work or a decent education.*

*This crisis is far too big for any one country to solve alone. To save and protect lives, governments worldwide must act together and responsibly. In a couple of months the United Nations and US President Obama are holding back-to-back summits in New York to address this unprecedented situation. These summits are opportunities for rich countries to commit to offering refuge to far more refugees than almost all have done to date, and for all countries to improve the way people forced to flee are treated, and provide them with a dignified future.*

## Man-made crises, inadequate response

More than 65 million people have left their homes because of violence, war and human rights violations. Most people are displaced inside their own country, due to violent conflict often perpetrated by the very authorities that are supposed to protect and uphold their human rights and ensure their safety. Many people flee their homelands for neighbouring countries that are often ill-equipped to help.

While each crisis that led to the 65 million people fleeing is complex and driven by a unique set of dynamics, none is inevitable and all are man-made – for it is governments and armed groups fighting over power and resources, from Yemen to South Sudan, that drive tens of millions of people from their homes. Neighbouring states and rich countries further afield sometimes fuel those conflicts and wars by supplying arms, or fail to do enough to support inclusive peace processes. For example, a surge in weapons purchased by Saudi Arabia (including from the UK and the US) leading a coalition of nations fighting in Yemen, helped push global arms sales up more than 10 per cent in 2015.

As revealed by ongoing Oxfam research, some governments have not only given their 'fair share' of aid for those whose lives have been blighted by Syria's terrible conflict, but also welcomed their fair share of Syrian refugees to their countries. But that is the honorable exception to 2016's far wider, more dangerous trend of governments turning their backs on the world's most vulnerable people and failing to uphold the spirit of the international law they claim to champion. And not all governments that have welcomed large numbers of refugees in the past are willing to continue doing so or to uphold the right to claim asylum.

In March, European governments and Turkey struck a controversial deal that has left thousands of men, women and children detained in Greece, often in shameful conditions and unsure of their legal status. The agreement trades human beings for political concessions, flying in the face of at least the spirit if not the letter of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the legal document defining the rights of refugees and the responsibilities of governments to protect them. By effectively outsourcing its border controls to Turkey, European governments triggered a domino effect. In May, Kenya announced the closure of the Dadaab camp for refugees, saying that if Europe could turn away Syrians, Kenya could do the same for Somalis. Turkey itself introduced visa controls for Syrians seeking to enter via third countries by sea or air; and reportedly around 70,000 Syrians are now trapped in the no man's land between Jordan and Syria, known as the Berm, since Jordan suspended admission of refugees after a suicide attack on 21 June.

Every government of course has the right to maintain its country's security. But this must be exercised alongside the responsibility to uphold international law to protect refugees. Whenever governments, in whatever country, turn their backs on refugees it puts some of the most vulnerable people in the world in dangerous and frightening situations. Worldwide, more than 5,400 people lost their lives in 2015 making treacherous journeys to reach a safe haven, while 3651 people died in the first six months of 2016 doing the same thing. Families are routinely separated, with parents often unable to find their children. Many have left possessions and documents behind, fleeing with just the clothes they're wearing. Some, in particular the most vulnerable including women and children and the sick, find themselves living out in the open or in overcrowded shelters, where conditions can lead to infections and disease.

In many countries, refugees are unable to work legally and risk being deported or sanctioned in other ways if they are caught trying to make a living. In some cases, people have no means to buy food, water or other essentials. Displaced children are often not able to go to school, which means generations being denied education. Marginalized in the countries they have found themselves, women and children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

There are horrifying stories from countries such as Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and South Sudan of destroyed homes, hospitals and schools, terrible injuries and loss of life and a day to day

existence that is frightening, stressful and unsafe. Many people cannot even contemplate returning to their home countries, such as Sudan and Somalia, as it would be too dangerous.

## Richest countries least welcoming

Oxfam calculations using the latest available UN figures, and the World Bank’s ranking of countries based on their economic wealth (GDP), highlight the stark divide between some countries that are offering practical help to refugees who desperately need a safe place to stay – and those that are not. In these calculations, Oxfam has followed the UN’s practice of including refugees registered both by UNHCR and the UN Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, set up in 1949 to provide help for Palestinian refugees, who it defines as people “who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”, and the descendants of Palestinian male refugees. As UNHCR’s latest global report set out, these Palestinian refugees account for 5.2 million of the world’s total 21.3 million refugees. Out of this total, the six biggest economies in the world host 2.1 million refugees.

### Top six wealthiest countries

Country	No. of refugees and asylum seekers hosted
United States	559,370
China	301,729
Japan	16,305
Germany	736,740
United Kingdom	168,937
France	336,183
<b>2,119,264 refugees and asylum seekers, or 8.88% of the world’s total</b>	
<b>56.6% of cumulative global GDP</b>	

### Top six countries and territories hosting refugees and asylum seekers (includes figures from UNHCR and UNRWA for Palestinian refugees)

Country	No. of refugees and asylum seekers hosted
Jordan	2,806,414
Turkey	2,753,760
Occupied Palestinian Territory	2,051,096
Pakistan	1,567,604
Lebanon	1,535,662
South Africa	1, 217,708
<b>11,932,244 refugees and asylum seekers, or 50.02% of the world’s total</b>	
<b>1.48% of cumulative global GDP</b>	

None of that means that all those six are doing everything possible to uphold the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, but overall they are taking a far higher share of the world’s responsibility than the world’s biggest economies. One way rich countries can welcome the most vulnerable refugees is through resettlement, a process in which refugees are provided

with a new start and life in a third country, a different one from the country they have fled and in which they currently live.

While some richer countries have provided some refugees with a new start, the number of people they have welcomed in this way is extremely small compared to the numbers of refugees hosted by other countries. In 2015, the six richest countries resettled just 57,167 people, fewer than six percent of the 960,000 men, women and children around the world in desperate need of resettlement that year.

There are other ways rich countries can welcome more refugees and ensure they do not have to embark on life threatening journeys to seek safety. Governments can make it easier for refugees' families to reunite in their country or offer humanitarian visas allowing refugees to travel safely to apply for asylum. None of these measures should ever be used as a way to undermine the right of people who have travelled outside of these routes to claim asylum in a country. The right to claim asylum – that is the right to seek protection from persecution – is a core tenet of international refugee law that must be upheld.

## **Outsourcing border controls**

In 2015, the six wealthiest countries gave \$1.9bn in aid to the UNHCR. Such aid is vital as it provides refugees with essential shelter, food, water and other support.

But providing aid cannot absolve rich countries from their moral and legal responsibilities to welcome more refugees. Aid should not be used by governments to put pressure on developing countries to host refugees and stop people from moving.

European governments were the architects of the 1951 Refugee Convention. But the refugee crisis is exposing the shallowness of governments' commitment to the international law they claim to champion. By trading refugees for political concessions, the EU-Turkey deal fails to respect the spirit of international and European law. Aid to tackle poverty and inequality in developing countries is crucial, but European governments are prepared to work with and provide aid to regimes such as Sudan and Eritrea, in order to prevent the movement of people. For example, a document outlining the EU's €46m project for 'better migration management' in Sudan and other countries revealed European officials' fears that paying for detention centres, cameras and scanners might lead to criticism of the EU 'engaging with repressive governments on migration'.

Such misuse of aid is set to become routine under the EU's latest policy aimed at outsourcing its border control. EU leaders recently declared that they will "create and apply" the necessary leverage" with countries of origin and transit in order to stop migration, in a move condemned by a broad coalition of over 100 European organisations. It is hardly surprising that a group of African civil society organisations condemned the EU's whole approach to aid and migration. 'The lure of European financial aid to fight against migration,' they said, 'transforms the African political authorities into persecutors of their brothers and sisters.'

## **September summits**

The record of many governments fails to reflect their people's attitudes. As Amnesty International research made clear in May 2016, in 22 out of 27 countries surveyed, from China to the USA, most people want their governments to do *more* to help refugees fleeing war and persecution. And around the world, there are countless acts of solidarity – from Greek villagers rescuing refugees from flooded dinghies to communities in Jordan that have provided *Iftar* meals and gifts to Syrian families during the holy month of Ramadan.

World leaders must heed those messages of solidarity and support, as they plan to meet in two months' time at two important summits in New York. On 19 September, UN Member States will come together for the first UN Summit for Large Movements on Refugees and Migrants. The following day, US President Barack Obama is inviting all world leaders to

tackle the refugee crisis. World leaders must not miss these opportunities to help millions of people fleeing conflict, disaster and poverty.

Ahead of the summits, Oxfam is calling on:

- Wealthy countries to welcome more of the world's refugees and to substantially increase their support for middle and low-income countries that are hosting the majority of people forced to flee.
- All countries hosting people forced to flee to provide the help and protection they need, ensure access to education, and allow them to work.
- All countries to uphold the human rights of all people on the move, both refugees and those fleeing within their own countries), irrespective of their legal status.

## **Oxfam's work with those fleeing violence and conflict**

Oxfam is working in over 20 countries around the world, helping people who have fled their homes because of violence, conflict or persecution. This includes bringing safe water to people in bombarded areas in Syria, providing food in South Sudan, and water and sanitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Yemen, Iraq, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and supporting refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. In Greece, Italy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, Oxfam is providing food and clean water and building much-needed toilets to prevent the spread of disease, and making sure people have the information they need to stay safe and obtain access to legal aid.

### **Case study: 'A refugee is a person who does not have any options'**

#### **Burundian woman aged 27**

One woman fled Burundi with her husband, brother-in-law and children after hearing that people were being intimidated during the elections in 2015:

*'Sometimes the police would stop us on our journey and tell us not to run away. We would have to go back home, wait until dark and then leave again. It took us one day to get from our village to Tanzania. For about three months we were staying in a mass shelter sleeping on mats. At night we could not go out alone, we feared we may be raped and had heard stories of a man who had tried to grab a girl. A refugee is a person who does not have any options, they are not able to do the things they would like in life. A refugee's life is only reliant on help. I don't feel good being a refugee. I don't feel good at all.'*

**ENDS**