



OXFAM MEDIA BRIEFING 18 July 2016

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 GMT 18 July 2016

A Poor 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.¹ 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 industrialized countries.²

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 percent 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 remaining 1.4 million between them.³

In sharp contrast, half the world's refugees and asylum seekers – almost 12 million people – are hosted by Jordan, Turkey, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pakistan, Lebanon and South Africa, whose economies collectively account for less than two percent of the world's total.⁴

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.⁵ 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 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), which is leading a coalition of nations fighting in Yemen, helped push global arms sales up more than 10 percent in 2015.⁶

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.⁷ But that is the honourable 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.⁸

Every government of course has a 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 3,651 people died in the first six months of 2016 doing the same thing.⁹ 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 they are wearing. Some 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 in which 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.

Case study: 'At night we could not go out'

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.'

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.¹⁰ 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 and asylum seekers.¹¹

Table 1: Top six wealthiest countries¹²

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
2,119,264 refugees and asylum seekers, or 8.88% of the world's total	
56.6% of cumulative global GDP	

Table 2: Top six countries/territories hosting refugees and asylum seekers (includes figures from UNHCR and UNRWA for Palestinian refugees)¹³

Country/Territory	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
11,932,244 refugees and asylum seekers, or 50.02% of the world's total	
1.9% of cumulative global GDP	

None of this means that those hosting the most refugees and asylum seekers are doing everything possible to uphold their rights, but overall they are taking a far higher share of the world's responsibility than those countries with the 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, less than six percent of the 960,000¹⁴ 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 refugee 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 almost \$2bn in aid to the UNHCR.¹⁵ 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'.¹⁶

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'¹⁷ with countries of origin and transit in order to stop migration, in a move condemned by a broad coalition of over 100 European organizations.¹⁸ It is hardly surprising that a group of African civil society organizations 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.'¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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 Muslim 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 on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants. The following day, US President Barack Obama is inviting all world leaders to tackle the refugee challenge. 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, including refugees and people forced to flee within their own country, 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 irrespective of their legal status.

Case study: 'We were left for six days with no shelter, food and little water'

Mastura, 45 in Greece

Mastura and her children had to leave Afghanistan when her husband went missing after the family was threatened. Her two eldest sons left the country last year and are in Germany.

'I had my own beautician business and this made our family a target for the Taliban. My husband is a taxi driver and one day went into town, there was a big fight and I never saw him again. I feared for our lives, so I didn't say goodbye to anyone, I just sold everything I owned including my business, took my children and ran.

Smugglers took us in a group and we had to walk for nearly 40 days, first through Iran and then to the Turkish coast. The journey took everything from me, my children were so tired. When we reached the coast, we were left for six days with no shelter, food and little water. On the sixth night finally we could travel by boat, my young sons were so scared and didn't want to get in, I had to try and calm them down. I never thought we would be in this situation, I thought once we arrived in Europe we could reunite with my older sons.'

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.

Notes

- 1 UNHCR. (2016, 20 June). *Global Forced Displacement Hits Record High*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>
- 2 UNHCR. (2016). *2015 Global Trends Report*. Page 2. Published 20 June 2016. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unhcrsharedmedia/2016/2016-06-20-global-trends/2016-06-14-Global-Trends-2015.pdf>
- 3 The World Bank's latest GDP ranking, for 2015, lists the United States, China, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and France as the top 6 economies, collectively accounting for 56.6 percent of global GDP (\$41,562,907,000,000 of \$73,433,650,000,000,000). World Bank. (2016). *Gross Domestic Product 2015* ranking table. Retrieved from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf>

Oxfam is following the UN's practice of adding UNHCR's latest global figures for refugees and for asylum seekers as well as, in relevant countries, UNRWA's latest figures for Palestinian refugees, in order to calculate total figures for how many each country hosts. See UNHCR. (2016). *2015 Global Trends Report*, page 2.

This provides a clear global comparison, but in different countries there may be other people excluded from these figures, and in some countries such as Turkey and Germany, there may be significant numbers who have arrived since UNHCR's latest global figures (published in June 2016 but up-to-date to December 2015), and who have just been registered (or are still awaiting registration) but not yet been given the chance to file an asylum application.

According to these figures, at the end of December 2015, the US hosted 559,370 refugees and asylum seekers; China 301,729; Japan 16,305; Germany 736,740; the UK, 168,937; and France, 336,183 – totalling 2,119,264. UNHCR. (2016). *2015 Global Trends Report*. See Table 1, page 3 of this briefing.

This total represents 8.88 percent of the 23,853,576 total number of the Refugees and Asylum seekers recorded in the relevant columns in that table, and refugees registered by UNRWA. See UNRWA. (2016). *Where We Work*. Retrieved from <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>

This total of 23,853,576 is less than the sum of 21.3 million and 3.2 million quoted above, because, for the purposes of this analysis, we have not included UNHCR data on stateless persons, etc.
- 4 Including UNHCR and UNRWA figures, the top six refugee and asylum seeker hosts are Jordan, Turkey, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pakistan, Lebanon and South Africa. Collectively, they account for 11,932,244 refugees and asylum seekers, representing 50.02% of the 23,853,576 global total mentioned above. Please see UNHCR's *2015 Global Trends Report* and UNRWA's *Where We Work* referenced in notes 2 and 3 above. According to the World Bank's 2015 GDP figures above, those six hosts collectively account for 1.9 percent of global GDP (\$1,398,287,000 of \$73,433,650,000,000,000).
- 5 UNHCR. (2016). *2015 Global Trends Report*, page 2.
- 6 IHS. (2016). (2016, 13 June). *Record-breaking \$65 Billion Global Defence Trade in 2015 Fueled by Middle East and Southeast Asia, IHS Jane's Says*. Retrieved from <http://press.ihs.com/press-release/aerospace-defense-security/record-breaking-65-billion-global-defence-trade-2015-fueled>; Bloomberg. (2016, 12 June). *Saudi Arabia's Weapons Imports Lead Surge in Global Arms Sales*. Retrieved from <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-06-12/saudi-arabia-s-weapons-imports-lead-surge-in-global-arms-sales>
- 7 Oxfam. (2016). *Syria Crisis Fair Share Analysis 2016*. Page 2. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/syria-crisis-fair-share-analysis-2016>
- 8 Estimated number based on the rations distributed by the International Organization for Migration at Rukban camp and UNHCR registration at Hadalat camp.
- 9 Missing Migrants Project. (2016). *Latest Global Figures*. Retrieved from <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/latest-global-figures>. This figure excludes the 11 deaths that were not specified by month in 2016. Note: All numbers represent only deaths that are reported by government authorities, media, the UN or NGOs. Countless others have died on migratory routes around the world; thus, these are minimums of the actual numbers. All should be taken as estimates.
- 10 Oxfam is following the UN's practice of adding UNHCR's latest global figures for Refugees and for Asylum Seekers as well as, in relevant countries, UNRWA's latest figures for Palestinian refugees, in order to calculate total figures for how many each country hosts. See UNHCR. (2016). *2015 Global Trends Report*, page 2; UNRWA. *Palestine Refugees*. Retrieved from <http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>
- 11 Please see note 3 above.
- 12 Please see note 3 above.
- 13 This ranking, and the figures for Jordan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Lebanon, include Palestinian refugees under the mandate of UNRWA, as well as those registered by UNHCR. The totals include, under UNRWA's mandate, 2,117,361 in Jordan; 1,276,929 in Gaza and 774,167 in the West Bank (which we have added together as 2,051,096 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory); and 452,669 in Lebanon. Please see UNHCR's *2015 Global Trends Report* and UNRWA's *Where We Work* referenced in notes 2 and 3 above.

14 Please see UNHCR figures for each country in 2015:

United States	52,583
Germany	2097
Japan	19
China	0
United Kingdom	1768
France	700
TOTAL	57,167

UNHCR. (2016). *Resettlement Statistical Database Portal*. 17 May 2016. Query by Country of Resettlement & Country of Asylum. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/573b8a4b4/resettlement-statistical-database-portal.html>

UNHCR also estimated that almost 960,000 refugees were in need of resettlement. See UNHCR. (2015). *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs: 2015*. Page 9. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/543408c4fda/unhcr-projected-global-resettlement-needs-2015.html>

The figure of 56,467 represents 5.882 percent of 960,000.

15 UNHCR. (2016). *Contributions to UNHCR for budget year 2015 (as at 31 December 2015)*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/partners/donors/558a639f9/contributions-unhcr-budget-year-2015-31-december-2015.html>

DONOR	Contributions to UNHCR for budget year 2015 (as at 31 December 2015) in USD
United States	1,352,454,631
Germany	142,859,376
Japan	173,500,535
China	941,841
United Kingdom	262,284,115
France	42,129,813
TOTAL	1,974,170,311

These figures do NOT include contributions that the UK, France and Germany made via EU institutions, or contributions made by any of the six countries to other UN or related pooled or humanitarian funds.

16 Der Spiegel. (2016, 13 May). *EU to Work with African Despot to Keep Refugees Out*. Retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/eu-to-work-with-despot-in-sudan-to-keep-refugees-out-a-1092328.html>

17 Council of the European Union. (2016). *European Council Meeting (28 June 2016) – Conclusions*. Retrieved from <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-26-2016-INIT/en/pdf>

18 Oxfam and others. (2016, June). *Joint NGO Statement Ahead of the European Council of 28–29 June: NGOs Strongly Condemn New EU Policies to Contain Migration*. Retrieved from https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/jointstatementeuimmigrationresponse.pdf

19 The Pan African Network for the Defense of Migrants Rights, and others. (2015, November). *Joint Statement: African Civil Society Condemns the Hunt for Migrants on the Continent*. <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2016/may/eu-africa-ngos-statement.pdf>

20 Amnesty International. (2016). *Refugee Welcome Survey 2016 – The Results*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/refugees-welcome-survey-results-2016/>

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