

Judy Asks: Is Europe Turning its Back on Refugees and Migrants?

A selection of experts answer a new question from Judy Dempsey on the foreign and security policy challenges shaping Europe's role in the world.

Yes and no. Europe is turning its back on the massive inflow of those who, for economic reasons, are seeking a better life. It is turning its back on those who are considered to be a danger—be it their fault or not. Europe has realized it has its limits, economic as well as cultural. Europeans, with their expensive welfare states, have slowly been realizing that they should protect their external borders. And if Europe is to keep its standards of living as well as its civic culture, it needs to be more selective in the cases of those seeking ways to an assumed paradise.

However, Europe's ageing population will need younger people. Today there is a kind of cultural clash that is being leveraged by politicians: Europeans are afraid on the one hand about their economic and cultural future but on the other hand they are not able to admit there is a need to solve the demographic issue. Checked and more controlled immigration might be a solution accepted by the public and not misused by populists if there is proof that a European melting pot would work mainly for Europeans, not mainly for newcomers. That will take time and a clever policy on the EU level, which takes into consideration the interest of all member states and the fears of their citizens.

Carmen González Enríquez Senior analyst at the Elcano Royal Institute

Since 2015 and the so-called "refugee crisis," both EU national and European authorities have evolved toward a more restrictive approach regarding irregular economic migration and refugees.

Even the usually more generous countries, such as Germany or Sweden, have modified their norms (or plan to) in order to reduce the number of people they accept as asylum seekers and limit the entry of family members of those who already enjoy refugee status. The wave of asylum seekers in 2015 has still not been processed: public administrations dealing with the examination of applications remain overwhelmed and, despite first hopes, most refugees have not been able to find work, posing a serious challenge to the welfare state. For

instance, only 17% of refugees in Germany have a job and the government in Berlin predicts long-term unemployment, as most lack the necessary qualifications or language skills.

Failure to integrate into the labor market is the main cause of the change of mood among both the general public and the authorities regarding refugees. As the overwhelming majority of refugees in Europe become permanent residents, their integration requires first and foremost a job. Without one, their situation becomes a source of political conflict that fuels xenophobia.

Stefan Lehne Visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe

While the number of asylum seekers has come down, the toxic effect of the refugee crisis on European politics continues to spread. The trend in Europe today is to cut financial assistance to refugees, curtail their freedom of movement, and reduce their access to social services and to the labor market. Making the lives of asylum seekers miserable might deter some people from coming to Europe, but it will also greatly impede the chances of successfully integrating those who are already there.

Deteriorating living conditions and an increasingly negative social and political atmosphere will alienate many non-native residents, separate them from their host societies, and eventually radicalize some of them. And when as a consequence of these restrictive policies problems with immigrant communities increase, hostility toward them will be ramped up in a vicious circle driving yet more people toward xenophobic populist parties.

There is not much time left to escape from this doom loop. The answer lies in harmonized European standards, burden sharing among member states, effective management of the external border, and genuine partnership with countries of origin and transit. This should be at the very top of a European reform agenda and requires determined leadership from Germany and France. The stakes couldn't be higher.

Denis MacShane Former UK minister for Europe

The answer is yes and no. The New York Times reported this week that "the Czech president has called Muslim immigrants criminals. The head of Poland's governing party has said refugees are riddled with disease. The leader of Hungary has described migrants as a poison ... [and] Austria's new far-right interior

minister suggested 'concentrating' migrants in asylum centers." Mrs. May said before Brexit that "the number of immigrants coming from Europe is unsustainable." Did she mean the estimated 600,000 Italians, 400,000 French, or 1 million Irish? On the whole they are welcome. 4 percent of Ireland's population is Polish, compared to 1.7 per cent in UK, but there is none of the anti-Polish hate headlines that British tabloids delight in.

What is clear is that the volume and velocity of people movement is very high and made worse by Mrs. Merkel's unilateral diktat to other countries to take in refugees that she invited to Europe from states destroyed by American, British, and French intervention in the MENA region. Islamist ideology with its loathsome anti-Semitism and hate of liberal democracy produces an equal and opposite reaction. At best this is manageable, but the politics of people movement is ugly and comes with easy openings for populist demagogues.

Mariann ÓryHead of the foreign desk at the Hungarian daily newspaper **Magyar Hírlap**

Rather than turning its back on anyone, European governments are starting to realize that their approach, which has been focusing merely on managing migration instead of stopping it, is not sustainable. The proposal concerning family reunification set out by the European Parliament in a recent report on the Dublin system reform scares even the government in Berlin because it would bring even more asylum seekers to Germany.

Mainstream parties in Western Europe can't afford to reject this approach in principle, like Central Eastern European countries do, but they do what they can to avoid its negative consequences. Austria's new government, even with the FPÖ as a coalition partner, is most likely to remain completely pro-European. But after winning the chancellery with the FPÖ's anti-immigration slogans, Sebastian Kurz must produce results.

Once European governments agree to secure the EU's external borders and handle migration outside EU territory, rather than praising legal immigration, the discourse will become a lot less heated. Central Eastern European countries are particularly sensitive about their sovereignty, but even Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a recent interview with Die Welt that he's ready to participate in an asylum mechanism if the country's sovereignty remains unharmed.

Marc Pierini Visiting Scholar at Carnegie Europe

Irregular migration from the Mediterranean area to Europe has been a permanent feature in the region for the past 40 years. Despite agreements with countries of origin and transit, and despite increased controls, this pattern has never stopped. It has simply become more sophisticated—and more visible—as communication technologies evolved.

EU governments have constantly been trying to get a grip on the phenomenon, including making attempts to distinguish between the right to asylum and excessive economic migration (the extent to which this works is another issue). The main challenge has been the increasing maneuverability of trafficking networks, especially their ability to quickly adapt to governmental decisions and make outrageous profits out of human misery.

What is new is the political impact that massive waves of refugees and migrants are having on European politics, especially since 2015. Very quickly, countries in the Western Balkans, Central Europe, and Austria have taken restrictive immigration measures, while Germany initially remained open to new arrivals. Now, on the whole, public opinion has shifted to favor limiting migration. In addition, far-right parties have registered progress on this issue almost everywhere in Europe.

The issue is now about how to strike a balance between compassion, economic needs, and restrictive measures.

Stephen Szabo Resident senior fellow at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies

Europe is coming to terms with the new nature of refugees and migration in a global setting. As a Pew Research Center study in 2013 found, the proportion of the global populace migrating has been stable at 3 percent, but population growth has meant that the total number of migrants has increased from 154 million in 1990 to 232 million. Europe receives about 31 percent of all migrants, both refugees and economic migrants. Given modern media and transportation networks, including sophisticated and ruthless criminal human trafficking organizations, the context has so changed that public policies must change as well.

Demographic trends in Africa and Europe and the impacts of climate change

mean that this is a problem that will only get worse. Europe is not turning its back on migration; it is simply confronting a new reality. The answer is not more acceptance of refugees but a major increase in development assistance to and investment in Africa, as well as other coercive efforts to block entry into the EU.

It is clear that Europe, and even Canada, have reached the political limits of assimilation. If democratic parties and governments do not respond, then right-wing extreme parties will.

Pierre Vimont Senior fellow at Carnegie Europe

Europe is not exactly turning its back on migrants. It is actually facing reality, which means adapting to today's new global dimension to migration and painfully trying to find the right balance between openness and restriction.

The current pressure of refugees and migrants moving out of Africa and the Middle East is imposing some difficult choices on Europe. Any European migration policy has to deal with saving lives, reinforcing border controls, improving the rules of asylum, fighting traffickers, and defining an effective security and development policy for the benefit of the EU's African and Middle Eastern partners. Amid this complexity, Europeans have been struggling, as seen in Germany and more recently in France, to fine-tune their initial humanitarian instincts with a more thoughtful but restrictive approach. This is all the more difficult as they confront populism, unemployment, and growing pressure on societal cohesion on the domestic front, which make migration increasingly unpalatable to local populations.

No wonder that Europe's efforts to get a firm grip on this global problem are being perceived at best as wobbling or, more worryingly, as tilting toward a closed-door policy. Yet the reality is that the migration debate in Europe will remain, at least for the time being, a difficult quest to find the right compromise between compassion and responsibility. In that context, the need for European nations to show more solidarity among themselves in sharing the migration burden will be indispensable if Europe wants to convey the same message of unity to the outside world.

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