

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the fourth Metro Detroit Model United Nations Conference. Over the past four years we have worked tirelessly to develop an exciting and innovative Model United Nations format that challenges our delegates in a competitive and inclusive environment. We work year-round to ensure that our staff members are as prepared as possible to ensure that all of our delegates can participate in our debates. Moreover, the topics that you will discuss have been carefully selected for their global importance and the larger questions that they ask. When reading through the following background guide, be sure to analyze and evaluate what larger questions are being provoked by the topic and what commentary these larger questions make about the current international system. Finally, if you have any questions, be sure to reach out to your chairs on the email address provided on their committee page.

We look forward to welcoming you in January,

Mitchell Dennis

Secretary General of the Metro Detroit Model United Nations IV

UNHCR Topic A 0

The Refugee Situation in the Mediterranean



History of the Problem

For the last four years, thousands of refugees have poured into Europe as a result of numerous worldwide conflicts. One of the main causes of this refugee crisis is the Syrian Civil War.¹ What initially started as a pro-democracy movement against the Syrian government has evolved into a civil war between the Syrian military, various civilian militant

groups and Daesh, or the so-called Islamic State.² Early on, Syrian refugees mostly fled into neighboring Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, but as the conflict has continued to escalate, many fear they will not be able to return to their native countries. With similar state-breakdowns in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Eritrea, many more refugees have left their homes in search of safety and better living conditions.³ Many of these afflicted nations border or have access to the Mediterranean Sea, causing many to travel by sea in hopes of reaching European nations.

Current Situation

In 2014, Europe saw an incredible jump in the number of refugees and migrants arriving by sea (an increase from 60,000 in 2013 to 219,000 in 2014).⁴ The majority of refugees entering are Arab men between the ages of 18-35, while 8% of all refugees were unaccompanied and separated children, which is a major concern as there is little being done to protect them.⁵ After landing in Mediterranean nations such as Malta, Italy, and Greece, many attempt to move further into Central Europe, in hopes of reaching Germany, Sweden, and other northern European nations.⁶ As Europe as

¹ "Alawites and the Fate of Syria" *The Ohio State University*. <http://origins.osu.edu/article/alawites-and-fate-syria>.

² "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts You Need To Know" *World Vision*. <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syria-refugee-crisis-war-facts>.

³ "Refugees or Immigrants? The Migration Crisis in Europe in Historical Perspective" *The Ohio State University*. <http://origins.osu.edu/article/refugees-or-immigrants-migration-crisis-europe-historical-perspective>.

⁴ "The Sea Route to Europe" *The UN Refugee Agency*. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/operations/5592bd059/sea-route-europe-mediterranean-passage-age-refugees.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Refugees or Immigrants? The Migration Crisis in Europe in Historical Perspective." *The Ohio State University*. <http://origins.osu.edu/article/refugees-or-immigrants-migration-crisis-europe-historical-perspective>.

a whole struggles with this migrant crisis, disapproval of how the European Union is handling the crisis runs high among citizens of Mediterranean countries, with disapproval ratings of 94% in Greece, 77% in Italy, and 75% in Spain.⁷ For some, it seems there is no end in sight to this crisis, and unless cohesive, multilateral action is taken, there may never be a solution to the ever growing problems.

Growing Pressures in Mediterranean Nations

Greece

In 2015, Greece became the most popular arrival destination for refugees. Greece has a population of 11 million, and it is estimated that there are 62,000 refugees residing in Greece currently.⁸ A preliminary survey of Syrian refugees that landed in Greece found that 60% had spent time in Turkey and 90% were hoping to move farther north into Europe, with Germany and Sweden as the most popular endpoints.⁹ Tilos, a small island of only 800, has accepted 50 refugees into their community and have helped integrate them into their society. Maria Kamma, the mayor of Tilos, explained that if others were to do what her small community is doing, “...there will be no refugee crisis, no humanitarian crisis, there will be no refugee problem.”¹⁰ However, this idyllic scenario is not the common refugee experience in Greece as a whole. Many refugees are placed in camps with no electricity, minimal supplies, and are treated poorly by the police.¹¹ As a result of these conditions, once refugees land in Greece, they make many attempts to reach Italy and other European nations.

Italy

Italy has become a focal point in the Mediterranean crisis in 2017. As of July, nearly all 200,000 beds for refugees were taken, and there is not enough space to house the thousands that enter weekly.¹² The majority of refugees heading to Italy are from Libya and other African nations, with 92,000 entering in just the first half of 2017.¹³ The Italian government has stated it has reached its “saturation point”, and have requested the assistance from the international community to help this issue that

⁷ “Overwhelming Majorities Unhappy with EU’s Handling of Refugees” *Pew Research Center*.

http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm_2016-08-02_europe-asylum-03/.

⁸ “Refugees in Limbo” *International Rescue Committee*. <https://www.rescue.org/country/greece#what-caused-the-crisis-in-greece>.

⁹ “The Sea Route to Europe” *The UN Refugee Agency*. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/operations/5592bd059/sea-route-europe-mediterranean-passage-age-refugees.html>.

¹⁰ “The Greek Island Where Syrian Refugees are Welcome” *BBC*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-40586229/the-greek-island-where-syrian-refugees-are-welcome>.

¹¹ “Refugees on Greek Islands Face Untenable Conditions” *Deutsche Welle*. <http://www.dw.com/en/refugees-on-greek-islands-face-untenable-conditions/a-39484932>.

¹² “Italy Threatens to Close Ports to Humanitarian Refugee Rescue Ships” *Independent*.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italy-close-ports-humanitarian-refugee-ships-saturation-point-migrant-boats-rafts-mediterranean-a7814121.html>.

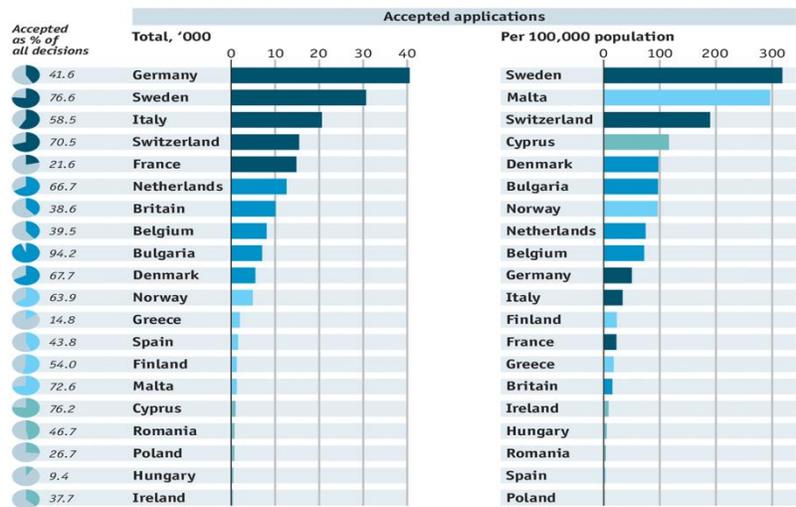
¹³ *Ibid.*

“cannot be an Italian problem alone.”¹⁴ The nation has discussed closing ports and turning away humanitarian ships as space dwindles for the continuous flow of refugees entering Italy.¹⁵ Especially as other routes are closed or become more difficult, it is likely that the migrant and refugee crisis will continue to affect Italy. Unless long-term solutions are found to the problems that drive migrants and refugees to leave their home countries, Italy will continue to be overburdened as 75% of migrants to Europe land in Italy.¹⁶

Bulgaria

How much room at the inn?

European decisions on asylum applications*, 2014



Source: Eurostat

* First-instance decisions only

Economist.com

refugees have to decide whether to risk entering through Bulgaria or risk their lives by sailing through the Mediterranean to another European nation.

Other Nations

Since the migrant crisis began, Poland and Hungary have not accepted many refugees, and the Czech Republic has accepted a mere 12 people.¹⁹ In 2015, European nations drafted a plan to help relocate those who had landed in Italy and Greece to other Eastern European nations to help ease the burden,

Bulgaria is a common point of arrival because of its border with Turkey, but many refugees do not wish to stay in Bulgaria as a result of its poor economy and under equipped refugee camps.¹⁷ Bulgaria has also begun constructing a border fence to “stop human traffickers from Turkey”, but some speculate it was in response to the massive influx of migrants as a result of the many crises as a preventative measure.¹⁸ As a result of this,

¹⁴ “EU Holds Crisis Talks About Migrant Influx After Italy Threatens to Block Rescue Ships” *Independent*.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-crisis-refugee-migrant-italy-block-rescue-boats-paris-summit-a7819656.html>.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶ “The EU can’t solve Italy’s migration crisis.” *Politico EU*. <http://www.politico.eu/article/eu-cant-solve-italy-migration-crisis-refugees-mediterranean-sea/>.

¹⁷“Refugees or Immigrants? The Migration Crisis in Europe in Historical Perspective” *The Ohio State University*.

<http://origins.osu.edu/article/refugees-or-immigrants-migration-crisis-europe-historical-perspective>.

¹⁸ “Border Fence With Turkey” *Global Security*. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/bg-border-fence.htm>.

¹⁹ “EU Launches Legal Proceedings Against Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic Over Handling of the Refugee Crisis” *Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-poland-hungary-czech-republic-refugee-crisis-handle-legal-proceeding-lawsuit-european-commission-a7789161.html>.

however these three nations have not complied with their obligations at all.²⁰ Hungary and Slovakia attempted to bring a case to the European Union claiming that the quotas for refugees to accept were unlawful. The court rejected this argument, however the Slovakian Prime Minister is still refusing to accept any refugees.²¹ While the nations who have refused refugees claim their decision is based on political reasons, others in the international community have scolded these nations for denying entry as a result of their personal beliefs and fears.

Germany Remains a Popular Destination

After reaching one of the Mediterranean nations, many refugees push to move further into Europe, with Germany remaining one of the top endpoints. In 2015, Chancellor Merkel was seen as an “angel of mercy” when she instituted an open-door policy for refugees entering Europe.²² Previously, refugees had to claim asylum in the first country they reached within the European Union (EU), but after waiving the EU rules, Merkel stated they would handle applications from Syrian refugees regardless of where they entered.²³ It is reported that Germany spent over €20 billion (~\$23 billion USD) in 2016 on refugees, €3 billion more than had been predicted.²⁴ As the number of asylum seekers in Germany reached well over 1 million, the German government saw a backlog of asylum seekers, causing them to offer €1,200 (~\$1,400) to those who would voluntarily go back to their home countries.²⁵ This program did not have much success, and many continue to pour into German borders. Even though the government has shown support for accepting refugees, German citizens are placed in a strange situation. Some fear *Überfremdung*, or “over-foreignization” as strangers enter their nation, speaking in foreign languages and behaving differently from German norms.²⁶

Dangerous Route through the Sea

Travelling by the Mediterranean is a treacherous journey that took the lives of over 5,000 people in 2016.²⁷ William Spindler from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said, “On average, 14 people have died every single day this year in the Mediterranean.”²⁸ 2017 has been a less

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²²“Migrant Crisis: Angela Merkel Hailed as an Angel of Mercy as Germany Opens its Doors” *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <http://www.smh.com.au/world/migrant-crisis-angela-merkel-hailed-as-an-angel-of-mercy-as-germany-opens-its-doors-20150908-gjhkmy.html>.

²³“Germany Readies for 40,000 Arrivals” *BBC*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34231905>.

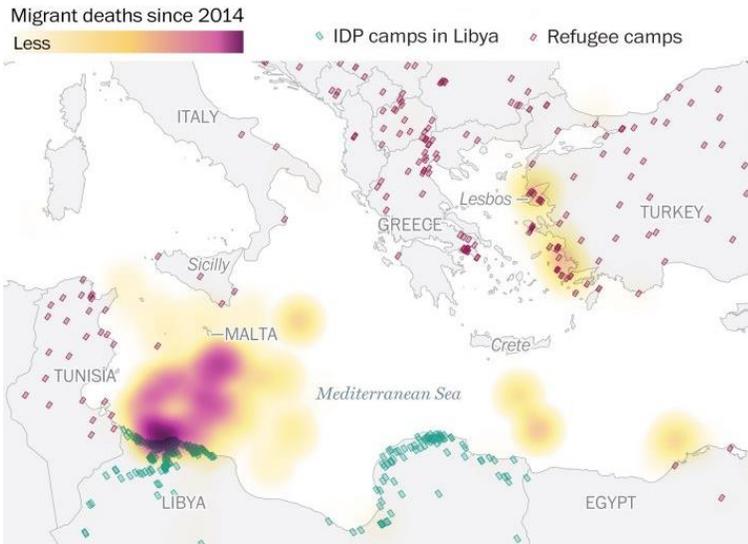
²⁴“Germany 'Spent More than €20bn on Refugees in 2016' as Crisis Outstrips State Budgets” *Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-refugees-spend-20-billion-euros-2016-angela-merkel-crisis-budgets-middle-east-north-africa-a7623466.html>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶“The New Europeans” *National Geographic*. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/10/europe-immigration-muslim-refugees-portraits/>.

²⁷“Mediterranean Migrant Deaths in 2016 Pass 5,000” *Al Jazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/mediterranean-migrant-deaths-2016-pass-5000-161223130357172.html>.

²⁸Ibid.



deadly year than those prior, with about 1,000 dying between Italy and Libya between January 1 and April 25.²⁹ Daily news reports of those who have drowned at sea document that the path to Europe is not becoming much safer, and the amount of refugees travelling on it has not dwindled. The majority of the deaths at sea occur off of the Libyan border, partially as a result of the high rate of refugees fleeing from Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and other refugee camps located in Libya,

Tunisia, Chad, and other northern African nations.

Measures to Prevent Deaths at Sea

The lower death rates can be attributed to the efforts of European nations to rescue those at sea. The first operation, called Mare Nostrum, was launched by Italy in October 2013 and was successful in saving thousands. It rescued 400 migrants a day on average, and in total rescued 150,000 in the year it was active.³⁰ Even with its successes, it was deemed unsustainable by the Italian government. Following this operation, multiple EU nations launched an operation similar to the Italian Mare Nostrum, which re-established the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, better known as Frontex.³¹ The initial funding and scope of Frontex was meant to simply enforce border control policies of the Mediterranean and other European nations while also working to prevent further sea deaths. After seeing few results and an immense increase in the number of those who died at sea, EU leaders decided to triple the funding for Frontex; this immediately helped increase the survival rate of those travelling by sea.³² Currently, Frontex is responsible for various tasks, including supporting search and rescue missions, assisting in return operations, and combating cross-border crime and

²⁹ “Over 1,000 Migrants Have Died Crossing the Mediterranean So Far this Year” *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/04/25/over-1000-migrants-and-refugees-have-died-crossing-the-mediterranean-so-far-this-year/?utm_term=.4793bff6df5a.

³⁰ “Italy to End Naval Operation That Rescued Thousands of Migrants” *Time*. <http://time.com/3543082/italy-navy-mare-nostrum-migrants/>.

³¹ “Origin” *European Border and Coast Guard Agency*. <http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/origin/>.

³² “The Sea Route to Europe” *The UN Refugee Agency*. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/operations/5592bd059/sea-route-europe-mediterranean-passage-age-refugees.html>.

terrorism.³³ It appears to be very effective in rescuing those stranded at sea, setting a great example for what else can be done to help prevent thousands more from dying at sea.

Besides measures that can be taken directly in the Mediterranean to prevent deaths, the international community must seek to control the conditions that trigger migrants and refugees to flee to Europe. While many refugees are provoked by complex conflicts, such as the failure of the Libyan state and the Syrian Civil War (which are beyond the scope of the UNHCR), many migrants come to Europe due to the poor economic conditions in their home countries. Many Sub-Saharan African migrants to Europe come from poor nations where the economic future is abysmal. Along this route many migrants perish, but their final destination is Europe. If the economic conditions could be improved in these countries, then it is likely that the flow of migrant workers would decrease. For example, to stem this transnational flow, the EU tried to crackdown on human traffickers working out of Agadez in Niger.³⁴ The EU poured €610 million in development aid into Niger. Their efforts seem to have been relatively successful, with migrants passing north through Niger dropping from 71,904 in May of 2016 to 12,923 in December of the same year.³⁵ However, the developmental aid is not the main cause of this short term decline in migrants, but rather the increased patrols in Agadez and along smuggling routes have substantially aided in the decline. Nevertheless, this type of deal could serve as guide for a short-term solution to the heavy flow of migrants across the Mediterranean if similar deals are extended to other countries along this route. In regards to a long-term solution, if the development aid can be administered correctly, then it is likely that migrants will have less of a reason to try to reach Europe through the Mediterranean. If fewer migrants are making the dangerous journey, then pressure will be taken off overburdened Mediterranean nations and can lead to a calming of the flow of migrants, making it easier to care for those who are already in Europe.

Reactions to Incoming Refugees

Defend Europe

With the large influx of refugees entering European nations, some native citizens feel as though they are losing their “safety and [their] way of life.”³⁶ A far-right group entitled “Defend Europe” has sparked controversy over their goal to “make the Mediterranean Sea more safe.”³⁷ After raising enough money and support, the group intends to respond to SOS signals and return the ships back to

³³ “Mission and Tasks” *European Border and Coast Guard Agency*. <http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/mission-and-tasks/>.

³⁴ “EU Strategy stems migrant flow from Niger, but at what cost?” IRIN. <https://www.irinnews.org/special-report/2017/02/02/eu-strategy-stems-migrant-flow-niger-what-cost>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Defend Europe Boat Tries to Block Migrant Rescues” *Al Jazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/defend-europe-boat-block-migrant-rescues-170717070055413.html>.

³⁷ “Our Mission” *Defend Europe*. http://defendeuropa.net/the-mission_fr/.

where they have sailed from, preventing them from entering Europe.³⁸ The basis for this group stems from the idea that the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating rescue missions are allowing this “illegal immigration” to continue, and that the NGOs are collaborating with human traffickers and threatening the safety of European citizens.³⁹ While support for this group is limited, it is unclear of what can and will be done by organizations like the UN and the UNHCR to prevent civilians from involving themselves in this crisis.

A Warm Welcome to Refugees

In its online series “The New Europeans,” *National Geographic* collected stories from refugees who has just arrived in Europe, and also spoke to those who had been in European nations for many years. These personal stories paint both a heartbreaking story of hardship and tragedy and a hopeful tale of a better life for those displaced. An older man describes how his family was welcomed into Europe, but like a “child reared from its mother” they want to return to their home.⁴⁰ A little girl is seen crying because she misses her father, but she also speaks of how she has friends and is able to go to school, which she was unable to do in Syria, and how she is happy in Germany.⁴¹ Halimo Mohamed, who fled Somalia 12 years ago, says “Sweden is the best...The ethics are high-ethics of helping each other.”⁴² Halimo, who now runs a store, demonstrates the successes that are possible when refugees are accepted and allowed to assimilate into a society, and also shows that there are many willing to welcome these migrants into their nation with open arms.

Questions to Consider

- What measures can be taken to help unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Mediterranean nations?
- To what degree have the actions to protect refugees on sea routes been effective? What more should be done to ensure their safety?
- How can the European nations focus on and implement the suggestions made by the UNHCR?
- In what ways can the international community assist nations receiving large numbers of refugees? What should be done, if anything, about nations who refuse to accept them?

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰“The New Europeans” *National Geographic*. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/10/europe-immigration-muslim-refugees-portraits/>.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.