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## **Refugees: Why they flee, what routes they take, and why so many are coming to Germany now**

Forced migration can take many forms, including flight or escape from difficult circumstances. Flight occurs when (semi-)state actors broadly restrict the agency and thus the freedom and mobility of individuals or collectivities. We can speak of forced migration when people are coerced into emigrating and have no other realistic options. Typically, it involves flight from violence that directly or indirectly threatens life, physical integrity, freedom and rights. The violence that causes people to take flight often involves ethno-nationalist, racist, gender-specific, or religious motives.

Forced migration was and is usually the outcome of war, civil war, or measures taken by authoritarian political systems. The First and Second World Wars, especially, were catalysts that precipitated key elements in the history of forced migration. Since the Second World War, conflicts surrounding and involving minorities, (armed) disputes about how to organize the political system, and efforts to homogenize the population of a given country have punctuated the long process of decolonization, which triggered numerous expulsions and waves of flight. In addition, the Cold War, as a global conflict of systems, had an enormous impact on forced migration events in the second half of the twentieth century.

To that list must be added the numerous and far-ranging journeys of flight that have taken place during the past few decades, especially in the context of war, civil war, or long-term state failure. They have occurred in many parts of the world: Europe (Yugoslavia), the Middle East (Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen), East Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan/South Sudan), West Africa (Congo, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria), South Asia (Afghanistan, Sri Lanka) and even Latin America (Colombia). In 2014 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted 19.5 million refugees, a figure that came close to equaling the high-water mark of the previous quarter century, which was reached in 1992 with 20.5 million refugees. But in addition there were a total of 38 million »internally displaced persons« who had sought to escape violence and persecution within a state. A further 1.8 million people were subject to asylum proceedings and awaited official recognition as refugees. All told, about 60 million people worldwide had fled their homes.

There are evident patterns to be found in these journeys of flight: As a rule refugees look for security in the vicinity of the conflict zones, because they usually hope to return to the regions they have left behind as soon as possible. Moreover, many of them lack the resources to flee farther, or they may encounter restrictions imposed by transit or destination countries that hamper or rule out a long-distance migration. For example, 95 % of all Afghan refugees (in 2014: 2.6 million of them) are in exactly this situation, having sought sanctuary in neighboring Pakistan or Iran. Much the same is true of Syria. The majority of the refugees from there, about 4 million, have fled to the neighboring countries of Turkey (2014: 1.6 million), Jordan (700,000), Iraq (220,000) and Lebanon (1.2 million). From this point of view, it should not be surprising that in 2014 countries of the Global South were sheltering no fewer than 86 % of all the registered refugees around the world. As the years have passed, this trend has shown a notable increase: that is, the share of refugees taken in by the countries of the Global South is actually on the rise vis-à-vis the Global North.

Flight is rarely a linear process; instead, most refugees move in stages. To begin with, there is often a hurried escape into the nearest city or some other nearby, apparently safe place of refuge, followed by a further migration to join relatives or acquaintances who live in a neighboring region or country. Then the refugees may look for an informal or official camp. Another typical pattern sees refugees returning to their homes, often more than once, only to be forced to flee again. Several factors underlie this dynamic, including constantly changing and shifting lines of conflict and perhaps the impossibility of finding safety at the place of refuge and the lack of opportunities to earn money or at least get access to the necessities of life. Frequently, people have to adjust to their precarious lives as refugees permanently or at least for a long period of time. That is the source of another stage in the saga of refugees: »camp-urbanization,« in which the camps become quasi-permanent settlements and evolve into »camp cities« with a somewhat urban character.

According to statistics supplied by the UNHCR, the number of border-crossing refugees around the world indeed has grown over the last four years. But that increase has been in line with trends that have been observed in the several decades since the Nineties. By contrast, there has been a much more rapid increase in the numbers of refugees classified as »internally displaced persons,« fleeing within their own conflict-torn countries. That circumstance makes it all the more relevant to ask why the Federal Republic of Germany so often has been chosen as a destination for these movements of flight since 2011-2012. Here we will sketch out six answers.

*First: Networks.* For the most part, migration is channeled through networks of kinship and acquaintanceship. One reason why Germany has become the most important European destination for Syrian refugees is that, even before the beginning of the civil war in Syria, it already had a quite extensive community of people originally from that country. Thus, Germany tended to become a central gathering place for refugees making their first attempts at resettlement after fleeing from the civil war. Also, because migrant networks increase the likelihood that more migrants will follow (migration begets migration), the immigration of Syrian refugees into the Federal Republic has exhibited a highly dynamic pattern during the last few months. Incidentally, the same holds true for other significant journeys of flight that have made Germany their destination.

*Second: Financial resources.* Refugees cannot usually migrate very far without (considerable) financial resources. Fees have to be paid upon exit and entry, then travel and transportation costs must be added in. Smugglers or middlemen demand large sums, while delays between stages along the migration route consume still more money. The very poorest migrants would be indulging in fantasies if they thought they could carry out a truly long-distance migration trek. Countless studies attest to the fact that poverty drastically limits mobility. It is primarily the more affluent who can set out on long-distance journeys, a fact that is confirmed by the influx of refugees into the Federal Republic from Syria and Iraq, for example. Finally, from a geographic perspective Europe is not that far from some of the most important points of origin for refugees (Syria, Iraq); hence the costs of a migratory trek for refugees from those countries can be kept within reasonable limits. That is not the case with journeys of flight from other global conflict zones such as those in West or East Africa, South Asia, or Latin America. Refugees from those continents seldom reach Europe.

*Third: Prospects for resettlement.* Countries have considerable discretion in deciding which migrants to admit and determining the status of those who have been certified as refugees entitled to protection. The willingness to grant sanctuary is always the result of a complex bargaining process among individuals and collectivities – including institutions

of the state – that have ever-shifting relationships, interests, practices, and schemes of categorization. Long-term changes in the political, administrative, journalistic, scholarly, and public perceptions of migration give rise to shifts in the way the issue is viewed, who will be regarded as a refugee and under which circumstances, and who will be accorded protection or asylum, to what extent, and for how long. In the period between 2010 and well into 2015, one can observe a relatively strong willingness in the Federal Republic of Germany to accept refugees, especially as compared to many other countries in the EU. The positive expectations Germans had about the future of politics, the economy, and society in their country, coupled with currently favorable economic and labor-market conditions, were responsible for this welcoming attitude. Public discussions about the looming shortage of skilled labor and an aging society, which had been going on for some years, laid the groundwork for this opening. But other factors were also involved, such as the acceptance of human rights standards and the acknowledgement that the requirements of offering protection, especially to Syrian refugees, could not be ignored. This pro-refugee attitude also manifested itself in a broad willingness among the German population to engage in volunteer work to aid the new arrivals.

*Fourth: Removal of barriers to migration.* The EU had previously adopted a policy of »securing its periphery,« which in practice meant keeping waves of refugees from coming too close to Europe. One outcome of the Arab Spring and the destabilization of many countries on the EU's margins was the breakdown of that system. The EU had initiated a »mobility partnership« and entered into a variety of cooperative agreements designed to enforce Europe's migration policy with countries such as Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Albania, and Ukraine. Since the Nineties, that cooperation had prevented many refugees from reaching the borders of the EU and filing applications for asylum. Together, the destabilization of those political systems and the shock waves emanating from the global economic crisis of 2007 exacerbated social conflicts within the countries on the EU's borders. The economic and political turmoil effectively curtailed those countries' governance capabilities as well as reducing their willingness to cooperate with the EU and/or limiting the scope of whatever cooperation remained.

*Fifth: The global economic crisis also affected countries that, from the viewpoint of »securing the periphery,« constituted the inner circle of the EU.* The »Dublin system,« developed in the Nineties, was consciously designed to seal off the EU's core states, especially the Federal Republic of Germany, from the worldwide wave of fleeing humanity. It worked for a long time. But on account of the devastating consequences of the global economic crisis, the various European border states, principally Greece and Italy, were increasingly reluctant to bear the brunt of the Dublin system, which for them meant having to register and apply their own national asylum procedures to the refugees who were arriving in the EU in ever greater numbers.

*Sixth: Germany as a replacement »country of refuge.«* Inside the EU, the global economic crisis sharply undermined the willingness of classic, high-profile »countries of refuge« such as France and Great Britain to grant protection to refugees. In this context, the Federal Republic was, as it were, cast in the role of a replacement country of refuge; hence it became a new and favored destination for the global wave of migration.



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