

OPINION PIECE: European countries need to focus stronger on resettling refugees with the greatest needs

In time for World Refugee Day tomorrow (20 June) [IZA World of Labor](#) is today publishing a new opinion piece on the refugee crisis. The economist Tim Hatton of Essex University argues that European countries need to find a system for sharing the burden between destination countries and for making sure that they focus stronger on resettling those in greatest need.

Refugee Resettlement in the EU by Tim Hatton

The migration crisis of 2015-16 threw the EU asylum system into chaos and fuelled the resurgence of populism across Europe. [...] 2015 witnessed the arrival of an unprecedented 1.82 million unauthorised migrants as the war in Syria and Iraq intensified and as border controls in Greece and Italy collapsed. These events exposed the inadequacy of the Common European Asylum System as never before. Here I argue that the need for burden-sharing between destination countries remains a priority but that it should be applied in the context of a resettlement program rather than as a response to ‘spontaneous’ arrivals.

Europe’s humanitarian programme should focus on resettling those in greatest need rather than selecting those that are willing to engage in hazardous clandestine journeys by land and by sea for the prospect of gaining recognition as refugees. Over the last 30 years the proportion of asylum applicants gaining some form of recognition is around 40 percent. So this system selects many who are not genuine refugees but often remain in Europe as illegal immigrants. Yet there are 16 million refugees in the world, most of whom are too poor to make the journey to Europe. These are often vulnerable people living in situations where there are serious threats to safety and where basic subsistence needs are barely met.

There are three key elements to policy reform. The first is to radically reduce unauthorised entry to Europe by land and by sea. [...] The second is to embark on a substantial resettlement programme. [...] The third element is to agree to a distribution scheme for resettling refugees which equalises the burden in different European countries. [...]

To assess whether such reforms would be politically feasible it is worth looking at three dimensions of European public opinion. First, surveys show that from 2002 to 2014 attitudes became more favourable towards hosting genuine refugees. However, attitudes are very negative towards illegal immigration, something that came to the fore with the migration crisis. Third, Europeans are surprisingly positive about having policy determined at the EU level rather than at the national level, something that would help to support a burden-sharing scheme. So a key feature of the policy reforms proposed above is that they would work *with* the grain of public opinion rather than *against* it as the existing system does.



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The full opinion piece will be available [here](#) later today. The opinion piece follows on from a [report](#) by Tim Hatton evaluating European asylum policies published previously on IZA World of Labor. Please credit IZA World of Labor should you refer to or cite from this opinion piece.

For World Refugee Day IZA World of Labor has put together a [short video](#) and [powerpoint presentation](#) on Integrating refugees in labor markets. Our key topics page also offers a range of content on [how migration policy affects the labor market](#).

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Notes for editors:

IZA World of Labor (<http://wol.iza.org>) is a global, freely available online resource that provides policy makers, academics, journalists, and researchers, with clear, concise and evidence-based knowledge on labor economics issues worldwide.

The site offers relevant and succinct information on topics including diversity, migration, minimum wage, youth unemployment, employment protection, development, education, gender balance, labor mobility and flexibility among others.

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