

Refugees as scapegoat for terrorism

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Abstract

In the last five years, there has been a growing concern about the fact that there might be some terrorist mix in the surge of refugees fleeing war-torn Muslim-majority countries. The concern resulted in people rethinking about refugees are granted asylums. Some Europeans call for their governments to quit bringing to their countries any more refugees at all. This however goes against what these countries agreed and signed in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 United Nations Protocol concerning the status of refugees.¹ In this article, it will be examined if it is true that migrants bring terrorists with them, how this proposition itself came to be, and whether or not there are rock solid data to support it. As it will be discovered in the following paragraphs, there is no direct correlation between refugees and terrorist activities that take place in different places which happen to be hosting refugees. Instead, the idea security threat in refugee host countries and migrants they accommodate roots from attitude the people in those countries have towards migrants, demographic differences as well as real world issues. The solution to this misconception requires both refugees and receiving nations to collaborate; such as the refugees helping authorities to identify any terrorist recruiter who may be lurking among them and on the other hand the authorities should devise a seamless system of border control in order to know who enters their countries and who leaves. They can also engage in activities helping the public to distinguish between terrorists and migrants by raising awareness.

Keywords: asylum seekers, terrorist attacks, refugee crisis, Schengen border control system, Islamic State,

Introduction

In the aftermath of the late 2015 Paris and Brussels Islamic State and Levant attacks, refugees already in Europe and others looking for asylum were heavily blamed for that year's Europe's deadly misfortunes. This misconception of terrorism and migrants did not begin that day neither did it stop to grow ever since. The growing migration trends, illegal migrants and the growing terrorism pressure fuel the negative public attitude towards refugees and migrants. Demographic differences such as age, religion and political beliefs in places like Europe also some into play; the old and less educated tend to be negative towards refugees. The existing negative attitude towards Muslims already residing in the countries hosting refugees also plays a role in keeping the narrative that incoming refugees are the major threat to their refuge countries security. On the top of these existing factors, there is an ever growing influx of refugees primarily coming from majority Muslim countries. A very good example of this surge of migrants which ended up in a refugee crisis, is when Greece failed to control the entry of asylum seekers passing through its borders. It may be argued that the identity and intentions of those who entered unchecked were not fully known. In the midst of this complex state of affairs, the public discourse can be easily found with unsubstantiated inclinations that there is a direct connection between migrants and terrorist attacks taking place on their land.

¹ The 1951 Convention: <http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

The 1967 United Nation Protocol Relating to Refugees: <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>

Change in refugee migration trend

Over about the past decade, a number of both internal and international migrants has quite been increasing. At the end of 2015, about 2 million migrants from the Middle Eastern and North African war-torn countries had arrived in Europe using Libya and Turkey as their passing routes. This was a huge increment in the number of refugees arriving to the shores of Europe compared to years 2013 and 2014 where refugee applications counted to 435,000 and 626,000 respectively.² This increased number of refugee arrivals in Europe carried on throughout the year 2016 where in only January and February up to 150,000 asylum applications had been received.³ With the current state of affairs in the Middle East, it is fair for one to expect this mass migration to Europe to significantly grow up to 5 million migrants within a couple of years ahead, as Yehuda Bauer put it.⁴ In an internal report, the German government stated that Germany is expecting to receive about 3.6 million refugees by 2020.⁵

In 2015, the Schengen border control system in fact stopped working when Greece and Italy failed to sustainably screen migrants coming from Libya and Turkey.⁶ For this reason, thousands of migrants proceeded towards Austria, Germany and Sweden. It is important to note that these were already the receivers of largest number of asylum seekers compared to other European countries.⁷ Based on this incident alone, it can be ascertained that the authorities could not fully clearly know the true identity as well as the motives of these unvetted migrants. In fact in 2015, only between 2 to 3 in ten asylum seekers had no legal travel papers. Some informants said that Islamic State attacked the Iraqi immigration office and stole over 200,000 unused passports together with materials to make individualized official identities.⁸ This may mean that Islamic State fighters may use these passports to blend in the migration crowds and continue carrying out their operations to Europe.

The instability in Northern Africa also plays a role in causing people to flee to Europe. According to the anti-racist organization *United*, about 15,551 migrants died between year 1988 and April

² BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35194360> ; M. Carr, *Fortress Europe. Inside the War Against Migration* (London: Hurst & Co., 2012), p. 278. – According to UNHCR, 74 percent of nearby 500,000 migrants who made it to Europe came from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. – M. Carr, op.cit., p.28.

³ Deutschlandfunk, 12th March 2016, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/mittelmeer-mehr-als-150-000-bootsfluechtlinge-seit-447.de.html?dm:news_id=590473 .

⁴ Y. Bauer, *The Migration Crisis – Some Thoughts* (Geneva: Genocide Prevention Advisory Network (GPAN), December 2015).

⁵ “Bund rechnet mit 3.6 Millionen Flüchtlingen bis 2020”, Reuters, 25th February 2015, <http://de.reuters.com/article/deutschland-fluechtlinge-idDEKCN0VY0H4>

⁶ Officially the Schengen system has been ‘suspended’ for a period of six months but it looks as though that period might be prolonged. – *Volkstrant*, 3 March 2016.

⁷ RAN (Radicalization Awareness Network), *Impact of the refugee crisis on the risk of a radicalization and consequences of prevention policies* (Vienna: RAN, 14th April 2016), p.38.

⁸ <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/Migration+and+Terrorism/151cedb5c3517e92> ; the high figure for the number of stolen passports was mentioned by the representative of an international organization at a workshop where the author was present.

2011 on the journey to Europe through North Africa or attempting to traverse the Mediterranean Sea.⁹ A greater number than this number has met the same trouble since then. Yet more than one million migrants succeeded in arriving in Europe. In his writings, Paul Collier, an economics professor at Oxford University indicated that Europe is not granting entrance to the right people.¹⁰ This is because the majority of the asylum seekers are strong grown up gentlemen who were able to pay a lot of money to smugglers to get them Schengen zone. The uncontrolled stream of migrants caused in people enough panic to compare it with 5th century barbarian invasions which led to the 476 A.D decline of the Western Roman Empire.¹¹

In Syria, about 5 million citizens have exiled the country while more than 7 million have been displaced internally (moving from unsafe to safer parts within the borders of the country). On the other hand 10 percent of Iraq's population – some four millions exiled abroad.¹² Currently, Turkey hosts about 260,000 refugees, Jordan about 640,000 , Iraq 250,000, Lebanon 1,000,000, and Egypt about 120,000 refugees.¹³

Ten Countries with Large Numbers of Refugees (mid-2015)

Afghanistan	2,632,534
Syria	4,194,554
Somalia	1,105,618
South Sudan	744,102
Sudan	640,919
DR Congo	535,323
Central African Republic	470,568
Myanmar	458,381
Eritrea	383,869
Iraq	377,747

Source: UNHCR. Mid-Year Trends 2015. Geneva: UNHCR, 2015, pp. 4-6 & Annex Table 1, pp. 21-24' <http://www.unhcr.org/56701b969.html>. – Not listed here is the case of the Palestinian people; originally up to 700,000 became refugees in 1948/49; currently more than 5 million of them as well as of their descendants live abroad. For partly political reasons 2nd and 3rd generation Palestinians who have settled permanently in third countries are still counted as “refugees” in the Arab world where, in many cases, they have not been allowed to integrate and obtain citizenship.

⁹ M. Carr. *Fortress Europe. Inside the War Against Immigration* (London: Hurst & Co., 2015), p.4.

¹⁰ P. Collier, “Ihr rettet die Falschen: Oxford-Ökonom attackiert Merkels Flüchtlingskurs”, *Focus* (Austria), 14th February 2016. His economic theory of migration, refer to P. Collier, *Exodus. Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

¹¹ Cf. J.B. Bury, “The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians”, *Norton Library*, 1967.

¹² M. Yahya, “Refugees and the Making of an Arab Regional Disaster”, <http://camegie-mec.org/2015/11/09/refugees-and-making-of-arab-regional-disorder/ilb0>.

¹³ Mercy Corps, “Quick Facts: What you need to know about the Syria Crisis”, 5th February 2016, <https://www.mercycorps.org/.../syria...jordan/quick-facts-what-you-need>

Increasing Terrorism Pressure

Al-Qaeda, one of the largest terrorist organizations in the world today had only 300 mujahedeen in Afghanistan at the time when the Pentagon and the World Trade Center were attacked on 11th September, 2001. The counter-terrorism operations conducted by the Western world proved to worsen the state of affairs rather than improving it. The Islamic State, one of Al-Qaida's next-in-lines consists of thousands of jihadist fighters with some 30,000 foreigners from more than 100 countries.¹⁴ In 2001, Al-Qaeda only had very few drilling camps in Afghanistan. Today, IS oversees a territory close to Belgium in size inhabited by over 8 million people in countries like Nigeria, the Philippines and Afghanistan. In the last 15 years 61, 000 terrorist incidents resulted into the death of 140,000 people while in the year 2014 alone, according to START, 44,000 deaths, about 40,000 severely injured and around 12,000 hostages resulted from 17,00 terrorist attacks.¹⁵

In the year 2014, more than half of terrorist attacks which took place were conducted by Islamic State and terrorist combatants. Recently, the majority of the killings has been carried out in countries with mainly Muslim population such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Nigeria.¹⁶ The aforementioned states account for 70 percent of all deaths due to terrorist acts in the year 2014. A few other countries like the Central African Republic, Somalia, Yemen and three non-Muslim majority states: Cameroun, South Sudan and the Ukraine had more than 500 fatalities each in 2014. It can be easily postulated that a large number of countries troubling with terrorism are Islamic countries and both the people causing terror and those suffering from it are Muslims.

¹⁴ A. P. Schmid, "Foreign (Terrorist) Fighters: a European Perspective", International Center for Counter-Terrorism – *The Hague*, December 2015. – The number of IS fighters has since gone down due to high casualty rates, desertions and returnees heading for their countries of origin. Monthly recruitment of new foreign fighters is said to be down by 90 percent as of April 2016, according to US military sources.

¹⁵ START (University of Maryland) Newsletter Highlights, "Worldwide terrorism in 2014", http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_GTD_OverviewofTerrorism2014_Aug2015.pdf?utm_source=START+Announce&utm_campaign=270cadb341-START_Newsletter_Aug2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a60ca8c769-270cadb341-45663445. Note: the fatalities figure included killed terrorists such as suicide bombers.

¹⁶ *Der neue Fischer Weltatmanach 2015/6* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2014), p.330.

¹⁷ "Nigeria's Borno state lost \$ 9.5 bn to Boko Haram – World Bank", World News Ghana Web, 21st March 2016, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Nigeria-s-Borno-state-lost-9-5bn-to-Boko-Haram-World-Bank-424798>

Ten Countries Suffering Highest Numbers of Terrorist Fatalities (2014)

Percentage of Worldwide Fatalities

Iraq	30.4%
Nigeria	23.0%
Afghanistan	13.8%
Pakistan	5.4%
Syria	5.2%
Somalia	2.5%
Ukraine	2.9%
Yemen	2.0%
Central African Republic	1.8%
South Sudan	1.7%
Rest of the World	11.3%

Legend: 100% (32, 685 fatalities)

Source: Data from START's GTD, University of Maryland, as quoted in Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Terrorism Index 2015. Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism Sidney: IEP, 2015, p. 16, www.visionofhumanity.org.

Public attitude towards refugees and migrants

Having seen how global migration has increased with clear correlation of the refugee crisis in different parts of the world especially in Europe, it is a good idea to understand the public attitude towards refugees and immigrants in the process of trying to figure out where this attitude comes from. It is going to be examined whether the attitude is positive or negative and why.

Refugees, migrants and asylum seeker

When different categories of migrants are laid out, it is easily noticed how public attitudes change according to every category in question. For example, in the UK, when people were asked about “immigration” tended to be negative in their opinions but were less likely to do so when different groups of migrants were detailed.¹⁸ Normally, people tend to be more in favor of people who are recognized as refugees than those who are recognized as asylum-seekers and other migrants.¹⁹ In a recent poll in Germany, two thirds of the polling participants said it is a state responsibility to admit refugees.²⁰ In other countries the portrait is rather different. In the survey conducted in the year 2016 in 11 different countries, it was discovered that there was a favorable inclination towards accepting refugees mixed up anxieties about what may happen when those refugees have been granted asylums.²¹ Actually, there are ongoing public debates on how migrants are related to the safety dangers they may bring along. This tarnishes the refugees favored status. In the Pew Research Center’s 2016 survey, it was found that the most respondents in the UK, Hungary, Greece, Poland, and Italy concurred with the idea that refugees were a serious menace to their nation.²² These mixed feelings have a close connection with the prevailing portrayal that a large number of incoming migrants have no licit entitlement to refuge. Around 50 percent of people surveyed in Europe concurred with the suggestion that ‘most foreigners who want to get into my country as refugees actually are not refugees. They just want to come here for economic reasons, or to take advantage of our welfare services’.²³ The proportion of those who agreed varies from country to country. For example, in Spain and Sweden about 30% agreed with the proposition while in India, Italy, Hungary, Turkey, Russia, South Africa, and Poland more than 60% of respondents agreed. Looking at these polling result, it is easy to realize how widespread the narratives of illegitimate asylum seekers even though the large number of migrants arriving in Turkey come from Syria, and the large number of migrants who use the Mediterranean route to get to Europe in the year 2016 originated from Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea – these are countries undergoing human rights violence, war and terrorism.²⁴

Legal vs illegal migration

The image of refugees is mixed up by an understandable stand against migrants who engage in illegal ways to get into the country – getting in without officially accepted documents such as passports and visas. As the graph below will show it, surveys taken across Europe, the United States of America and Australia showed that there are serious worry irregular entrances.

¹⁸ Ford, R. (2012), *Parochial and Cosmopolitan Britain: Examining the social divide in reactions to immigration*, report for the George Marshall Foundation ‘Transatlantic Trends: Immigration’ project.

¹⁹ Mayda, A. (2006) ‘Who is against immigration? A cross-country investigation of individual attitudes towards immigrants’. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 88 (3): 510-530. O’Rourke, K., and Sinnott, R. (2006) ‘The determinants of individual attitudes towards immigration’. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 22: 838-861. Hatton, T. J. (2016) ‘Immigration, public opinion and the recession in Europe’, *Economic Policy*, 31(86): 205-46.

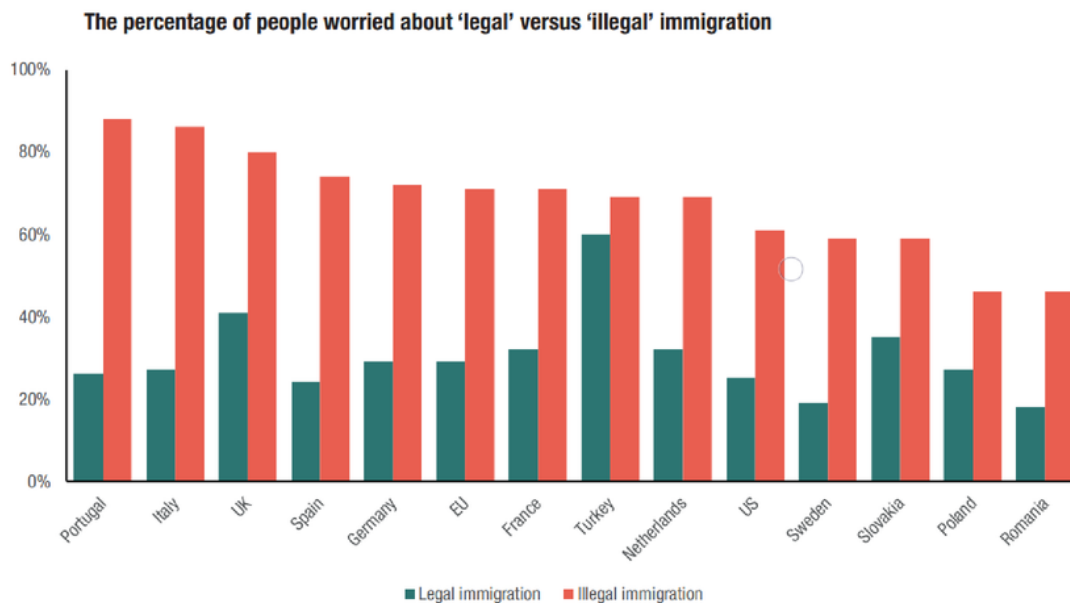
²⁰ Purpose (forthcoming, 2017) *Germany and France segmentation research study, in collaboration with Ipsos MORI and IFOP*. Research directed by Stephen Hawkes and Tim Dixon.

²¹ TENT (2016) *Public perceptions of the refugee crisis*. New York: TENT Foundation.

²² Wike, R., Stokes, B., and Simmons, K. (2016) *Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

²³ Ipsos MORI (2016a) *Global views on immigration and the refugee crisis*. London: Ipsos MORI

²⁴ UNHCR (2017a) *Mid-year trends 2016*. New York: UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/58aa8f247/mid-year-trends-junc-2016.html>



Source: *Transatlantic Trends*, 2013. Based on surveys with 1,000 people per country between 3 and 27 June 2013.

Demographic differences

It has been shown through different studies that malice towards migrants is less common amongst the youth, people who have liberal inclinations in their political spectrum and more well informed people.²⁵ In Winkler 2015 for instance, it was shown that except Sweden, in all other European country over 40 percent of older respondent exhibited negative attitude towards immigrants; there are even other countries such as Hungary, Greece and Cyprus where the figures were as high as 80 percent.²⁶ As Schotte and Winkler (2014) indicated, this is a generational issue not because of people get more negative as they get older.²⁷

It is a good idea to understand that the large percentage of migrants landing the shores of Europe originate in majority Muslim countries. In Europe, the image of refugees is highly affected by not so positive perspectives about Muslims hitherto residing in Europe. About 60 percent of people living in countries like Greece, Italy, Hungary and Poland admit having averse judgements about Muslims residents in their respective countries.

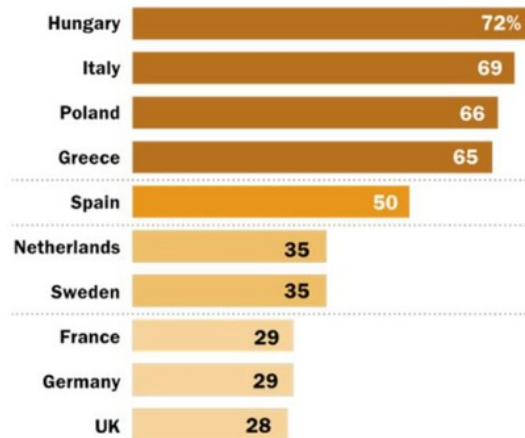
²⁵ Crawley, H. (2009) *Understanding and Changing Public Attitudes: A Review of Existing Evidence From Public Information and Communication Campaigns*. London: The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, IOM (2015) *How the world views migration*. Paris: International Organization for Migration (IOM), Heath, A., and Richards, L. (2016) *Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents: Topline Results from Round 7 of the European Social Survey*. London: European Social Survey ERIC, TENT (2016) *Public perceptions of the refugee crisis*. New York: TENT Foundation.

²⁶ Winkler, H. (2015) *Why do elderly people oppose immigration when they're most likely to benefit?* Washington DC: brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2015/07/22/why-do-elderly-people-oppose-immigration-when-they-are-most-likely-to-benefit/>

²⁷ Schotte, S., and Winkler, H. (2014) *Will aging societies become more averse to open immigration policies? Evidence across countries*. SSRN Working Paper Series.

Views of Muslims more negative in eastern and southern Europe

Unfavorable view of Muslims in our country



Note: In Poland, question was asked of a subsample of 686 respondents.

Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey, Q36c.

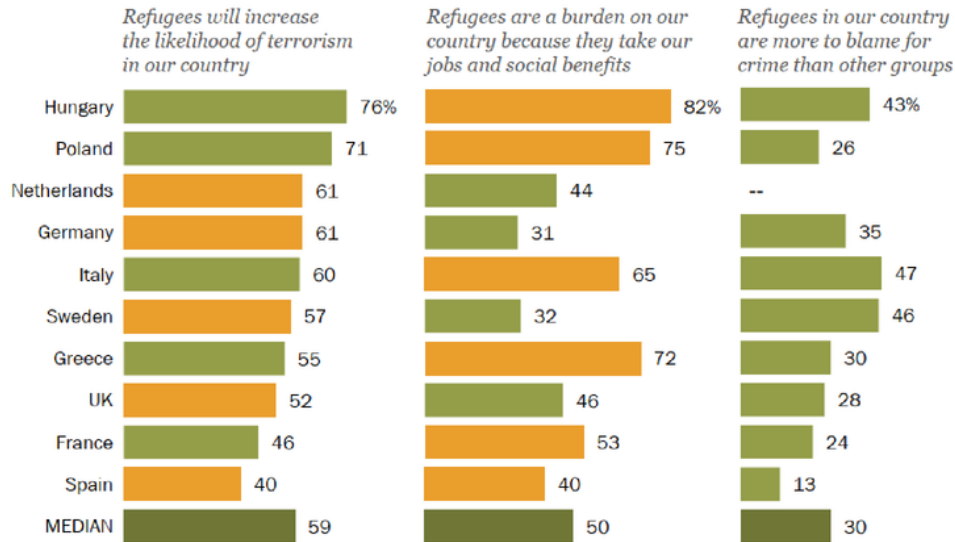
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Connection between refugee crisis and terrorism

Europeans think that there is a relationship between the refugee crisis and the danger of terrorism. This was found after the Pew Research Center surveys showed that in eight out of ten surveyed European countries, more than half think that the increased number of arriving migrants increases the possibility of terrorism in their states.

Many Europeans concerned with security, economic repercussions of refugee crisis

Top choice



Note: Netherlands excluded on question about crime (Q51b) due to administrative error.

Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey. Q51a-c.

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In spite of all the fear there is, there has been no correlation between the fear that refugees were bringing terrorists with them and the number of refugees coming into the country. Poland so far has been one of the European countries which received a few thousands of refugee applications in 2015, but 73 percent of the surveyed people in Poland responded that refugees were a major threat. On the other hand, Germany for example has had more than hundred thousand applications and only 31 percent responded that they were worried about the refugees.

The Europol has not found rock solid evidence that terrorists have “systematically” used the surge of refugees to enter the EU. However, the Europol found that on some occasions, terrorists used migratory flows to enter the EU. For example, two of the terrorists in the November 13th, 2016 attack in Paris had entered the EU through Greece among a large number of refugees from Syria.

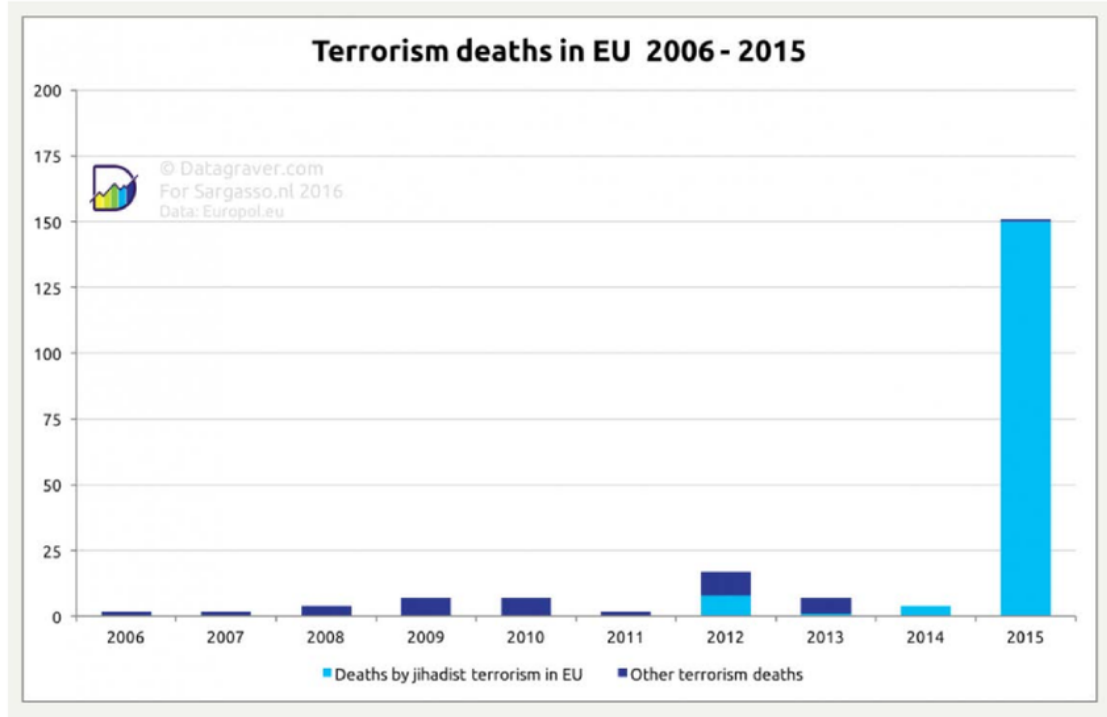
Radicalization

It is to be noted that the refugee camps are prone to being a fertile ground for radicalization which is well put by Ladbury as “the social processes by which people are brought to condone,

It is to be noted that the refugee camps are prone to being a fecund arena for radicalization.²⁸ There are a lot of factors that lead to radicalization such as religious education, unemployment, and insufficient or a complete lack of education, As we look at these factors, it can be easily spotted out that the typical refugee life is characterized by the above-mentioned elements. It is then easy for refugees to become a target for terrorist to come and indoctrinate especially those who are still at the young age into taking on a new identity as jihadist fighters. Let us not forget that the search of identity is one of the top priorities in the youth.

Terrorist attacks

It cannot be clearly determined as to what extent the refugee crisis has contributed to the terrorist attacks the European Union has been facing, but one thing is obvious; there has been an increase in jihadist terrorist attacks resulting into a huge number of deaths since millions of refugees started entering Europe. One can postulate that the deaths in 2015 went through the roof. The numbers of terrorist attacks continued to increase throughout the year 2016. This can be easily represent by the following graph:



Conclusion

In the aftermath of the 2015 Paris and Brussels the European perspective on refugees and terrorism changed. The video of long trails of migrants crossing the Balkans heading to the west of Europe combined with these terrorist attacks created an image in the minds of people that in some ways terrorists and migrants overlap and that when talking about terrorists and refugees one is referring to

the same thing. However, the very few occurrences where terrorists portray themselves as refugees should be understood for what they really are; exceptions.

The surge of another 500,000 migrants at the end of 2015 was for the most part the result of various reasons including the embracing speech of Germany's Chancellor on the 5th September 2015. In the same year (2015) the UNHCR financial supporters substantially reduced their contributions to Jordan and Lebanon refugee camps. It is not to be forgotten that the hope of an early defeat of the Assad government vanished after the Russian intervention. In response to this, many Syrians in Lebanon and Turkey decided to go to Europe instead of staying for some more years in refugee camps (Note that the average refugee condition last 17 years).

The European Union member countries could have come up with a plan of how they were to share refugees depending of every member's carrying ability. If this had been done, there is no way that a region where about half a billion people reside would have trouble dealing with a few millions of refugees. Other European countries stood watching when Greece was failing to manage the refugee stream. Up to now the Schengen Accord still has no rigid system of monitoring entering and leaving refugees.

However, the technical solutions by far involves making sure that the public understands the different between migration and terrorism. Those who are looking for asylum in Europe should have a public dedication to appreciate and revere the host countries' laws and culture. The refugees should also be obliged to assist the authorities to spot out the terrorist recruiters in order to stop those who would end up joining the jihadist fighters. Dedications like these are a few of the responsibilities to take in order to successfully rebuild themselves on a land that overcame its own religious struggles that lasted hundreds of years.

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