

Refugee crisis in Europe: Your questions answered

11th September 2015



What has happened?

In the first seven months of 2015, 340,000 refugees and migrants arrived in the European Union, according to Frontex, the agency that coordinates EU border controls. This compares to 123,500 people in the same period in 2014. The increased number of refugees seeking a new life in Europe is largely a consequence of humanitarian crises around the world. More than 60 per cent of those who have arrived this year originate from countries affected by conflict such as Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Many are now living in poor conditions, with European governments struggling to provide adequate support.

How is CAFOD responding to the crisis?

Thanks to your donations, we work in many of the countries where refugees originate from, including [Syria](#), [Sudan](#), [South Sudan](#) and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#).

We are also supporting our sister agencies in the Caritas network across Europe as they provide aid to newly arrived refugees. For example:

In France: Secours Catholique (Caritas France) are providing food, blankets, clothes and hygiene items such as soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste to refugees in Calais,

and have also been lobbying the Mayor of Calais and the French Home Secretary to do more to help.

In Italy: Local diocesan teams from Caritas Italy meet refugees as they arrive in ports in Sicily, providing them with water, warm clothes, blankets and food. Caritas Italy provides around 6,000 beds for migrants and refugees, as well as food, clothing, Italian lessons, training, legal advice and psychological and medical support. It also runs centres for child migrants and refugees throughout the country.

In Greece: Caritas Greece runs a refugee centre in Athens, where there is a soup kitchen and where refugees can seek supplies, language classes, and psychological and legal help. It also supports refugees on the islands of Chios, Lesbos and Kos.

Within the European Union: CAFOD is a member of Caritas Europa, which lobbies the European Union about the treatment of migrants and refugees.

[Donate to our Refugee Crisis Appeal](#)

CAFOD's mandate from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is to support poor communities in developing countries. [CSAN](#) (the Catholic Social Action Network) is the social action arm of the Catholic Church for work in England and Wales. Their members support refugees and they do advocacy work on poverty in the UK. Together, CAFOD and CSAN form Caritas England and Wales.

What is the position of the Catholic Church on the crisis?

In a [statement on the refugee crisis](#) released on 9 September, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales wrote:

“The refugee crisis is a huge challenge, not only in Europe and the Middle East, but in many others parts of the world where large numbers of refugees live deeply uncertain and perilous lives. Consequently, as a Catholic community, and as a country, we need to be committed to helping refugees over a long period. To sustain that effort we need moral imagination.

“We recognise that we can all contribute and play a part in helping to support the most vulnerable of refugees. Such assistance includes:

- Prayer
- Financial support
- Time and professional skills (e.g. language teaching, legal help, advocacy)
- Shelter and accommodation

“We can all be attentive to those who are vulnerable and newly arrived in our local communities and parishes. A warm welcome can be the most simple yet effective of gifts we can all offer.”

On 6 September, Pope Francis invited every parish, religious house and monastery in Europe to respond to the growing refugee crisis by offering a place of sanctuary to

families fleeing from war and persecution in their home countries. The Pope called on our generosity and solidarity to recognise and act upon our common humanity. Earlier this year, the Pope made an appeal to the international community to protect refugees crossing the Mediterranean, after 700 people drowned off the coast of Libya. In his Angelus address on 19 April, he reminded us that “they are men and women like us, our brothers seeking a better life, starving, persecuted, wounded, exploited, victims of war. They were looking for a better life.”

Bishop Patrick Lynch, Chair of the Migration Policy Office for the Catholic Church in England and Wales, has urged governments to do more to help migrants and refugees, and to examine the root causes of the current crisis. He wrote: “We must face up to the shared responsibility of making the world a better and safer environment to live in. We must examine as a matter of urgency the arms trade that fuels armed conflict and civil war, climate change, unjust economic policies, poverty and corruption as some of the underlying causes of this fundamental global trend. The safety of vulnerable women and children who may fall prey to smugglers and human traffickers is paramount and must be addressed.” [Read the full statement.](#) [Find resources on the Refugee Crisis for children and young people.](#)

Should the UK government accept more refugees?

CAFOD, alongside other agencies, has consistently called on the UK government to accept more of the people most at risk - including women and children at risk of sexual violence, disabled people, and people who need urgent medical and psychological support.

While one in three people making the journey to Europe have fled the conflict in Syria, this accounts for only a small minority of Syrians who have been made homeless by the war. Lebanon, a country one hundred times smaller than the EU, currently accommodates 1.2 million Syrian refugees - more than 50 times as many refugees as EU ministers have agreed to resettle in the future. While the UK has led the world in its humanitarian aid contribution to the Syria crisis, CAFOD believes that we have a moral responsibility to share the burden with countries like Lebanon and offer a safe haven for more of those in need of protection.

While we welcome the Prime Minister’s recent pledge to take 20,000 Syrian refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme over the course of this Parliament, we are calling for real urgency in the government’s actions. Vulnerable Syrians don’t have 3-5 years to wait to be granted a humanitarian visa in the UK. We need the government to make steps to speed up the process of identifying and offering relocation to Syrians in the region and to ease the burden on neighbouring countries in the Middle East.

Make your voice heard, [email the Prime Minister](#)

What can I do to help?

Please join us in [praying for refugees](#) facing exploitation around the world. Donate to the [CAFOD Refugee Crisis Appeal](#) to support our work with refugees arriving in Europe, and those caught up in the war in Syria who have fled to neighbouring countries.

Ask the Prime Minister to increase resettlement places for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees - [email David Cameron](#) today.

Find out more about the crisis - use our [resources for children and young people](#).

Help your [local diocese](#) support refugees.

Offer shelter, time and skills to support refugees through [one of the organisations listed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference](#)