



**GALMUN 2025**  
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**UNHRC**  
**Research Report**

**GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025**  
*United Nations Human Rights Council Research Report*  
*The Right to Family Life for Migrants and Refugees.*

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**Refugees:** Refugees are people who are forced to flee their home country due to war, conflict, and violence.

**Migrants:** Migrants are the people who moved away from their usual place of residence whether internationally or internally for various reasons.

**Asylum:** “protection that a government gives to people who have left their own country, usually because they were in danger for political reasons.”<sup>1</sup>

**UNHRC - The United Nations Human Rights Council:** A body whose mission is to promote and protect human rights around the world.

**OHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights:** “A department of the United Nations Secretariat that works to promote and protect human rights that are guaranteed under international law and stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.”<sup>2</sup>

**UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights:** The UDHR is a foundational document adopted by the United Nations in 1948, establishing universal human rights standards.

**CRC - Committee on the Rights of the Child:** A UN committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which aims to protect children’s rights worldwide.

**Council Of Europe:** established in 1949 and contains 12 countries only, but nowadays it has 46 countries from Europe. Its job is to deal and solve the issues that are ongoing in Europe.

**UNHCR - Office of High Commissioner for Refugees:** Agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.

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1 Oxford Dictionary, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/asylum>.

2 United Nations. (n.d.). *Protect human rights*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/protect-human-rights>.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

When refugees flee war or conflicts to other countries they might get separated from their families, which makes it harder for the separated individuals to rebuild their life all over again. In addition, one factor that complicates the situation even further for the families is the lack of contact with the rest of the family members that arises due to the severe conditions of conflicts and civil strife, with many being unable to know the conditions of their closest family members or enquire about their well-being and safety.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, family reunions are a major concern for refugees and asylum seekers, as it upholds and protects their right to family life. While applying for asylum is an essential step in achieving that goal, additional legal pathways exist to facilitate family reunification. These include resettlement programs, humanitarian visas, and family reunification initiatives, which are often accessible to migrants and refugees regardless of their asylum status.

Nowadays, approximately 281 million people don't live in their country of origin. While immigration can be a positive experience, it also has its disadvantages; migrants are not guaranteed full citizen rights in their host countries, which makes them vulnerable to numerous challenges in addition to facing illegal discrimination and hatred due to xenophobic sentiments amongst the host nation's population. This makes it harder for them to rebuild their life and to make use of the rights recognized by the United Nations. All this also applies to the experience of refugees and asylum seekers.

Additionally, we can recognize the many technical obstacles and challenges that refugees and asylum seekers face when seeking to reunite with their families. Lack of easily accessible information in their native tongue regarding family reunification procedures, including eligibility requirements, guidelines, and available support services, is a significant problem. Furthermore, many people lose out because the deadlines for asylum applications are frequently short. Additionally, some states charge application fees, and others have stringent income requirements that require refugees to demonstrate their ability to provide for their families.<sup>4</sup>

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3 The right to family life and family unity of refugees and ... (n.d.-b). [https://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/03/CH\\_Essential-right-to-family-unity\\_Frances-Nicholson\\_2018.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/03/CH_Essential-right-to-family-unity_Frances-Nicholson_2018.pdf).

4 16, A. (n.d.). *Family reunification*. UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/long-term-solutions/complementary-pathways/family-reunification>.

## GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

### *United Nations Human Rights Council Research Report*

The UN recognizes certain human rights such as the right to a family, the right of children, and the right to protection, who all highlight the importance of dignity and justice for all humans. The importance of family as a fundamental unit of society is captured in this quote that was taken from Jastram and Newland's "Family Unity and Refugee Protection" that states:

"As the foundation, there is universal consensus that, as the fundamental unit of society, the family is entitled to respect and protection. A right to family unity is inherent in recognizing the family as a 'group' unit: if members of the family did not have a right to live together, there would not be a 'group' to respect or protect. In addition, the right to marry and found a family includes the right to maintain a family life together. The right to a shared family life is also drawn from the prohibition against arbitrary interference with the family and from the special family rights accorded to children under international law."<sup>5</sup>

Different states deal with the issue of refugee and asylum seekers' family unification in differing manners. This depends on the state's policy history, social attitudes and their legal framework. For example, Canada offers a lot of programs and strives for reuniting the refugees and migrants with their family members after or during the fleeing. On the other hand, Australia combines humanitarian visas with strong border control laws. It is often the case that refugees came through UNHRC.<sup>6</sup>

Family separation has a lot of social issues. For refugees, especially children, the separation can cause trauma and long-term distress and isolation. Such experiences may cause such mental harm that rebuilding lives, or even being integrated into other communities becomes impossible. If refugees lack the support of family, they are more likely to feel isolated which makes it considerably harder for them to assimilate into their host societies.<sup>7</sup> While many countries have moved away from practices of separating minors from their families or removing them from their homes, cases of such actions have been implemented, which led to controversy. In Sweden, a video alleging family separations sparked global criticism in

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5 Jastram and Newland, "Family Unity and Refugee Protection", above fn. 3, pp. 555-603.

6 *Refugees and asylum-seekers*. World Migration Report. (n.d.). <http://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/refugees-and-asylum-seekers>.

7 How the "zero tolerance" family separation policy ... (n.d.-b). <https://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/USCRI-Family-Separation-Impacts-Brief.pdf>.

2017.<sup>8</sup> However, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare denied the claims, stating such actions contradict their principles. Incidents such as these have arisen in numerous countries, especially throughout Europe, sparking allegations and tensions that impact both refugees and the international reputation of host countries.

Such policies for host countries are at odds with social cohesion and injure their global image. Separating families rends human rights internationally by using them as scapegoats. Furthermore, families play a pivotal role in achieving stability and integration of refugees so they must be resettled but this equally undermines smoother refugee resettlement.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

As for now, family unity stands as a problem for both immigrants who seek new opportunities and refugees who seek safety. Some countries lack awareness and do not take the proper steps to aid in family reunification, such as the legislation related to family reunification which imposes the additional requirement that the family members must independently meet the refugee definition. On the other hand, some other countries are short of the legal and administrative structures, and of course, there are the countries who are active in the family reunification field, taking actions and assisting all the individuals in need.<sup>9</sup> Some of the countries who actively help with family reunifications include Germany, which is considered as one of the largest donors for the UNHRC and is also the third largest refugee-hosting country in the world. Germany is also known for facilitating family reunification for refugees.<sup>10</sup> In addition, New Zealand is known as a “resettlement country”, i.e. it is a country that opens its doors to asylum seekers who have originally sought asylum to other countries.<sup>11</sup> It also has a family reunification programme for refugee families that offers up to 600 places each year for eligible refugees who already settled in New Zealand to sponsor family members to join them.<sup>12</sup>

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8 *Muslim parents whose children were taken away by Swedish social...* Getty Images. (n.d.). <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/video/muslim-parents-whose-children-were-taken-away-by-swedish-news-footage/1369171922>.

9 The right to family life and family unity of refugees and ... (n.d.-c). [https://www.unhcr.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/03/CH\\_Essential-right-to-family-unity\\_Frances-Nicholson\\_2018.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/03/CH_Essential-right-to-family-unity_Frances-Nicholson_2018.pdf).

10 *Germany*. Global Focus. (n.d.). <https://reporting.unhcr.org/donors/germany>.

11 *New Zealand*. UNHCR. (n.d.). <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/new-zealand>.

12 *The refugee journey*. New Zealand Red Cross. (n.d.). <https://www.redcross.org.nz/about-us/what-we-do/in-new-zealand/supporting-refugees/the-refugee-journey>.

## **TREATIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:**

UNHRC has worked globally with non-governmental organizations aiming for a nicer future for both immigrants and refugees and their families.

### **Examples of some organizations:**

**Mesila:** Mesila was established by the Mayor of Tel Aviv-Yafo in 1999 in order to provide basic services to the foreign community, with a particular focus on children and families. The UNHCR supports Mesila in addressing this situation by providing assistance and pedagogical guidance to caretakers, parents, and communities.<sup>13</sup>

**RefugePoint:** RefugePoint is an organization that partners with the UNHRC, it seeks long term solutions for refugees to ensure healthy lives, and to help them become contributing members of society. Other than that, it has side programs that aim to reunite refugee families.<sup>14</sup>

**Catholic Legal Immigration Network - CLINIC:** CLINIC fights for the legal rights of immigrants, it trains and hires high quality and affordable immigrant legal services that could help defend and support vulnerable immigrant populations to get through their problems with the help of several programs, such as providing direct representation for asylum seekers in the U.S.-Mexico border and educating them about their rights, reuniting formerly separated families, increasing legal representation for those in removal proceedings and in detention, and more.<sup>15</sup>

### **Examples of some treaties:**

**1951 Refugees Convention:** in this convention, 149 countries agreed on the refugees' rights including the family right for refugees and family reunification issues. The first countries who signed the convention were Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia and Luxembourg, which was a turning point for the refugees' family issues.<sup>16</sup>

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13 *Working in partnership.* UNHCR Israel. (n.d.). <https://www.unhcr.org/il/en/local-partnership>.

14 *Creating lasting solutions for refugees.* RefugePoint. (2024, September 11). <https://www.refugepoint.org/>.

15 *Stories of immigration.* Homepage | Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC).. <https://www.cliniclegal.org/>.

16 UN. (n.d.-e). <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20189/volume-189-I-2545-English.pdf>.

**European Convention on Human Rights:** the convention was signed in 1950 by the Council of European Countries, it discussed the family rights for the citizens and migrants of Europe.<sup>17</sup>

## **CRITICAL EVENTS & TIMELINE**

- **10 December 1948:** The UDHR defined the family as “the fundamental group unit of society and as entitled to protection and assistance” and they set up the protected status of ‘family rights’ and emphasized the importance of family unity for refugees and migrants.
- **28 July 1951:** The refugees convention was signed and discussed the rights of refugees and it affirmed that the unity of family is essential for refugees.<sup>18</sup>
- **20 November 1989:** The General Assembly passed resolution A/RES/44/25 “Convention on the Rights of the Child” that emphasized the right of children to not be separated from their family against their will.
- **22 September 2003:** The Council of the European Union passed council directive 2003/86/EC on ‘the right to family reunification’ that facilitated the right of non-European citizens who live in European countries to bring their families to live with them in order to avoid family separation.
- **March 2011-2015:** The Syrian refugee crisis occurred due to a violent government crackdown on public demonstrations, which is considered the world’s largest refugee crisis. This led to numerous refugee related challenges in the host countries, including ones that relate to family reunification.
- **April 2018:** The Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy affected the many thousands of migrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border without going through the proper legal channels. It has led to thousands of children being separated from their families before they were taken into shelters. This policy sparked huge public protest and legal action, bringing attention to family rights and eventually causing policy changes.<sup>19</sup>

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17 European Convention on Human Rights. (n.d.-a). [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG).

18 *The 1951 refugee convention*. UNHCR. (n.d.-b). <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention>.

19 Domonoske, C. (2018, June 19). What we know: family separation and “Zero tolerance” at the border. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621065383/what-we-know-family-separation-and-zero-tolerance-at-the-border>.

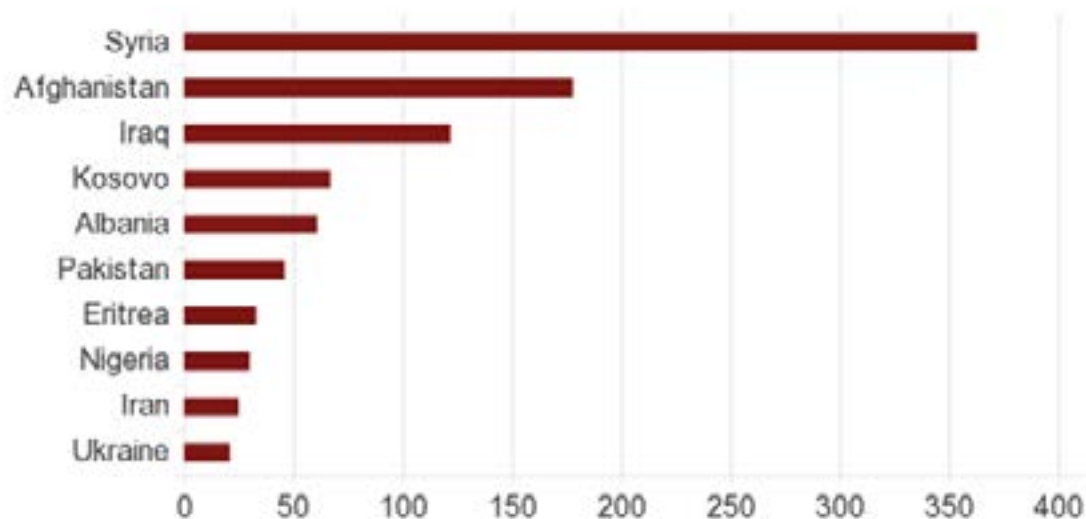
## QUESTION TO CONSIDER

- Has your country been a host to a significant number of refugees and migrants?
- Does your country offer migrants and refugees the right to family life? What are their policies regarding this matter? Are there special programs for family reunification?
- Are there any institutes or organizations that protect this right for migrants and refugees within your country?
- What integration programs does your country have that support family unity for refugees and migrants?
- What are the future steps that your country is willing to take in order to enhance the rights to family life for refugees and migrants?

## RELEVANT MEDIA

### Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU

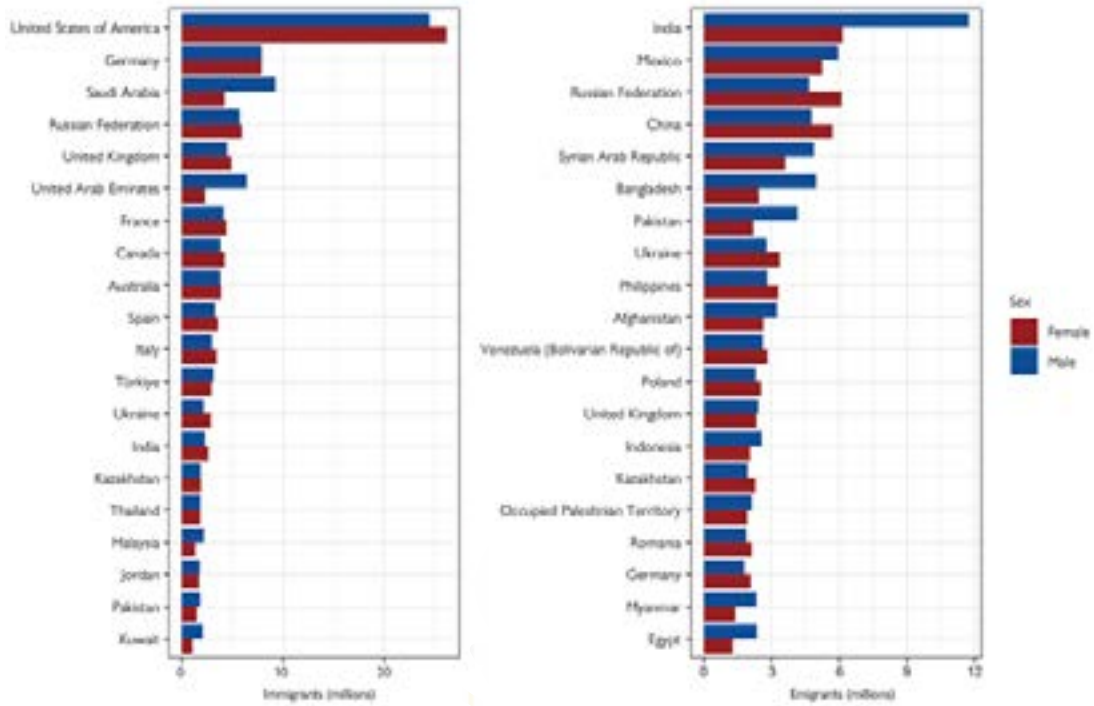
First-time applications in 2015, in thousands



Source: Eurostat



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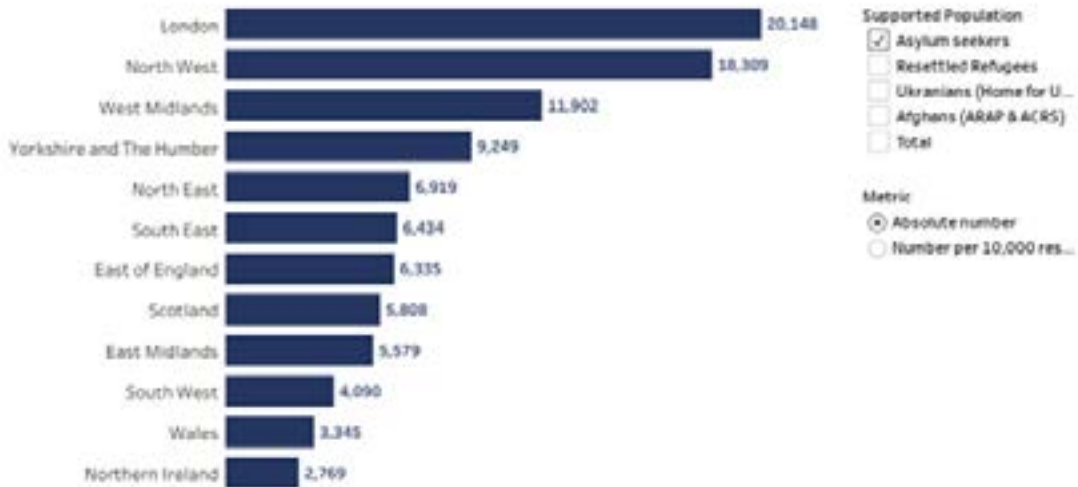


**Where do asylum seekers, resettled refugees, Afghans and Ukrainians live?**

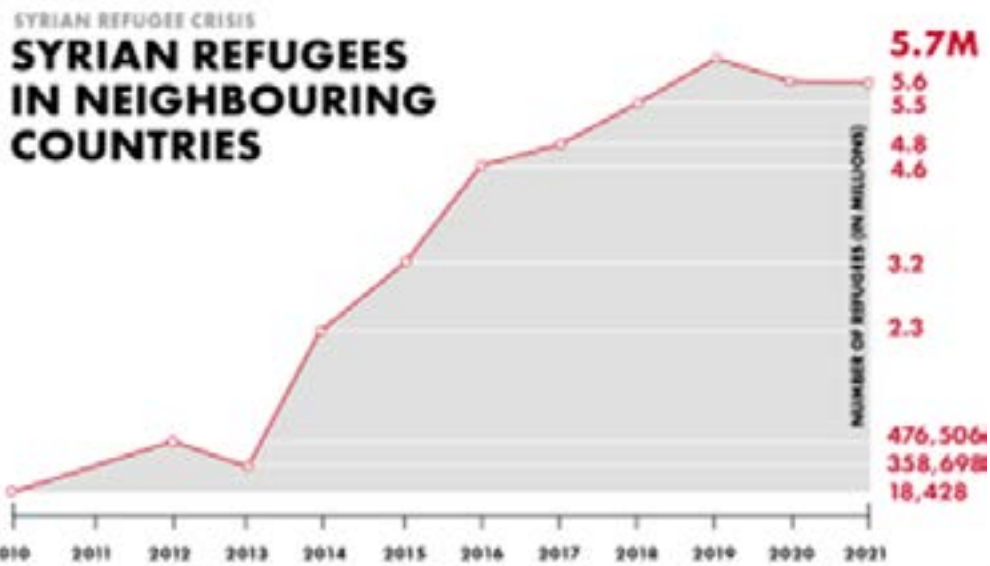
Absolute numbers and per 10,000 resident population, by population of interest, and by local authority (map) and UK region (chart), as at 31 March 2024

Select Chart

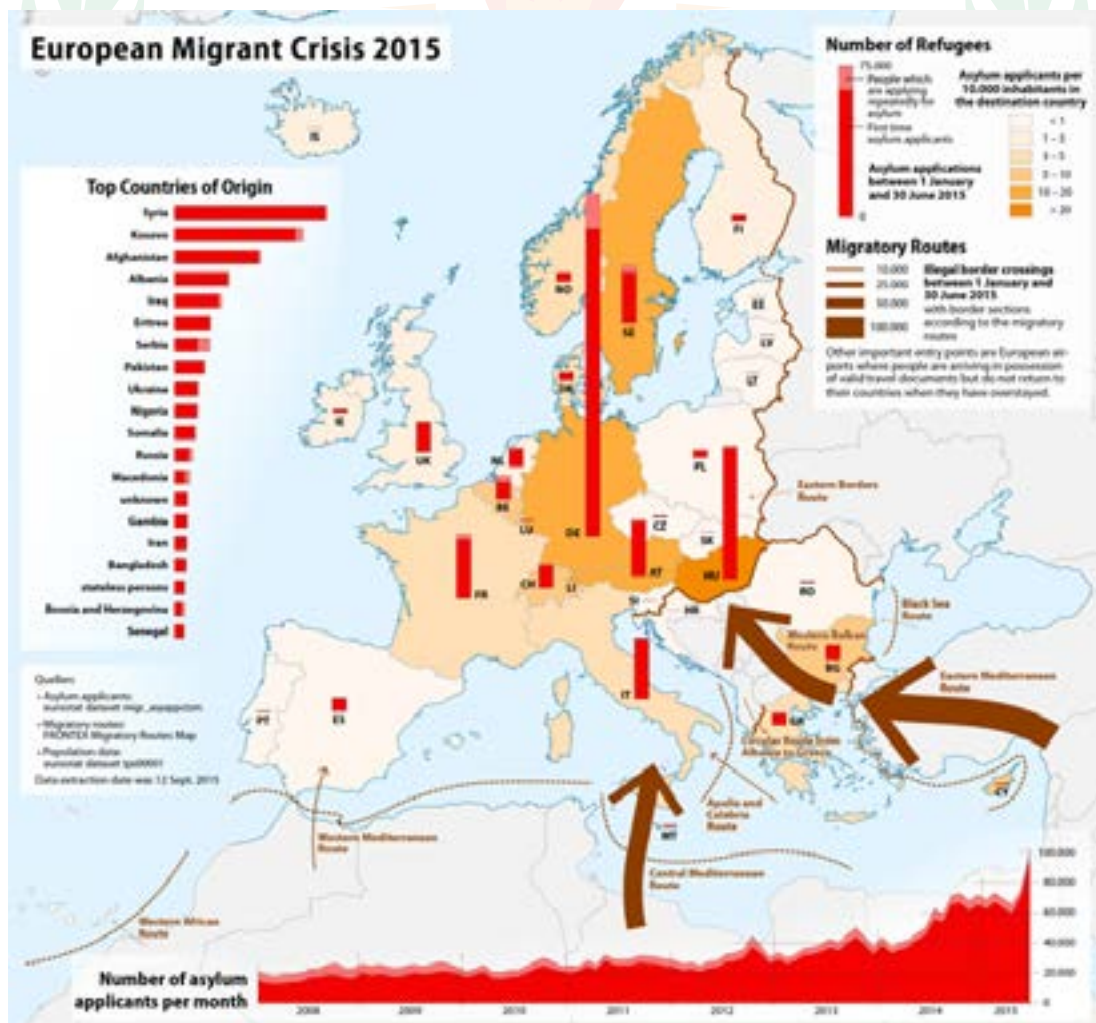
Regional Chart



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Reported as of February 26, 2021. Source: UNHCR 2020



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

- [United Nations Human Rights](#)
- [Research paper by Frances Nicholson](#)
- [Migration Factsheet](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)
- [Sweden battles disinformation on ‘kidnappings’ of Muslim children](#)
- [The “Essential Right” to Family Unity of Refugees](#)
- [Nearly 450 refugee children disappear from asylum hotels in UK, Parliament debate on family visas told | The Standard](#)
- [Refworld](#)
- [The right to family life for migrants and refugees - 2001](#)
- [The 1951 Refugee Convention | UNHCR](#)
- [Family Unity and Refugee Protection](#)
- [Immigration policy | Fact Sheets on the European Union](#)
- [International migrants: numbers and trends | World Migration Report](#)
- [Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants - Amnesty International](#)

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