



Refugee crisis: How SEiSMiC countries are coping

Civil wars in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East have created a refugee crisis unparalleled in recent times. Millions have been displaced in their own countries, as well as in neighbouring states and Europe. The different ways in which local populations and refugees have coped offer a fascinating study of resilience and social innovation.

Turkey

An estimated 3.1 million refugees have arrived in Turkey, making it host to the largest population of refugees in the world according to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (March 2016).

The government is housing around 280,000 refugees in 25 camps and has spent EUR 7 billion on food, education and other services. However, 90 percent

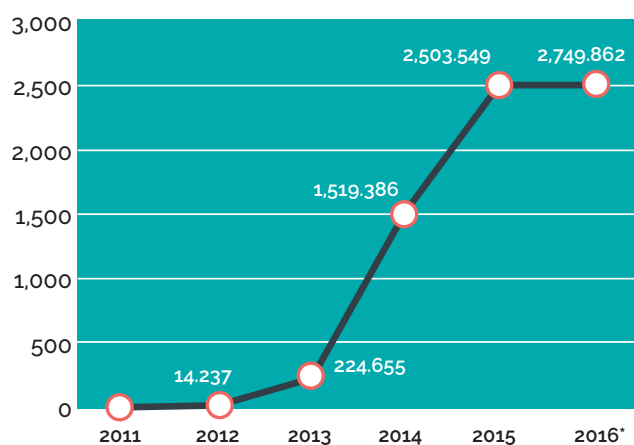
of refugees live outside the camps and have limited access to this support.

Many refugees choose to make it on their own and their impact on the economy has been enormous, including in SEiSMiC partner cities Istanbul and Hatay, which are each home to nearly 400,000 refugees. In some Turkish border towns, Syrian refugees outnumber the local Turkish population.

The Syrian influx has brought both opportunities and risks. It has been a boon to the property market, for example, but while landlords benefit, renters are increasingly hard pressed to find affordable housing. The same dynamic affects the labour market. According to a survey of recently unemployed workers in border areas, 56.1 percent believe they lost their jobs to Syrians.

Although the government began granting work permits to Syrians in 2015, the majority of working Syrians operate on the black market. While Syrians have established about 10,000 firms in Turkey, just 2,827 are officially registered, according to the Turkish Economics Ministry. Of these registered firms, 60 percent operate in Istanbul.

Number of Syrians under the temporary protection regime of Turkey, by year



*As of April 28, 2016

Germany

By December 2015, Germany had received nearly half a million refugees — more than any other EU country except Greece (although the latter has been more of a transit country than a destination), according to Wikipedia. This has had a profound effect on the economy. In the fall, the government set aside EUR 6 billion to deal with the crisis, creating thousands of jobs in construction, education and other services. Meanwhile, officials have sought to relax restrictions on refugees taking temporary work.

In addition to the governmental response, civil society has stepped up. Tech-savvy Germans have created online maps to orient refugees to the services and information they need, and

to steer civic-minded Germans towards opportunities for volunteering.

One of the most innovative of the new online maps is "Arriving in Berlin", which was developed by residents of a refugee centre. The content is gathered by refugees themselves through direct research, personal experience and crowdsourcing, and all data provided by third parties are reviewed. Further details can be found on the SEiSMiC website ("German Map Apps Help Refugees").

Sweden

Sweden has accepted more Syrian refugees per capita than any other country — over 100,000 people (about 1 percent of the population) had applied for asylum by December 2015 (Wikipedia). Officials were expecting the number to double by spring 2016.

The government projects that it will spend more than EUR 6 billion annually on refugees until 2020, according to a recent EurActiv report. As in Germany, Swedes are applying all available tools to cope with the crisis, including social innovation.

One innovative approach to temporary housing is the "Västervik solution", where local municipalities purchase shelters directly rather than waiting for lengthy government procurement processes. The community of Västervik paved the way by buying a number of modular homes then leasing them to the Swedish Migration Agency. Several other communities have followed suit.

State-civil society cooperation also comes into play at the Vinnova Agency, which has opened a call for projects on "innovation for integration and safer migration". The call promotes measures like the existing Hej Främling! (Hello Stranger!) initiative, which organises nature walks and other activities to bring together native Swedes and recent immigrants to have fun and socialise.