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## Unaided Refugees Make ISIS Stronger: Europe and the Worst Humanitarian Crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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*The worst humanitarian crisis of this century so far is unfolding daily in Europe's closest neighbourhood. Some 10 million Syrians and Iraqis have been displaced by sectarian conflicts over the past three years, and are living suspended lives in camps or makeshift shelters across the Middle East. It is as if all of Austria or Hungary was forced out of their homes. The fate of displaced Syrians and Iraqis is not only a moral dilemma for Europeans, it is a future security threat in the making. If abandoned and unassisted they risk becoming radicalised in the future, creating a potential recruitment and support base for anti-European extremism. Although the EU, and especially its better-off Member States, have already done a lot to assist the region with the refugee flow, response to the crisis should be expanded further, tailored and diversified. It should also be shouldered equitably by all EU members, in proportion to their size and national income. This crisis is too big and its consequences too far-reaching for any EU member to opt out.*

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, almost half of the population of this seemingly secular Arab autocracy has been uprooted and displaced. According to the latest figures, around 6.5 million Syrians have been internally displaced, and more than 2.8 million have left the country and sought refuge outside its borders.<sup>1</sup> Added to that, around 1.5 million Iraqis have been internally or externally displaced for the past year.<sup>2</sup> In late 2014, the total displaced population in the Middle East roughly equalled that of a mid-sized central European country—the equivalent of Hungary, Belgium or Austria.

The majority of the nearly 3 million Syrian refugees are hosted by the country's immediate neighbours: Jordan, Turkey and the increasingly fragile Lebanon, which has taken by far the highest number of refugees. Some have found shelter in the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq, which is also housing a sizable number of the Iraqis displaced by the recent ISIS offensive; most of the other Iraqis have been displaced internally. The region's hospitality has, however, come at a price, both for the refugees and the populations hosting them, expressed in rising competition for paid work, access to schools and health facilities, and rapidly rising food and housing costs.

<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Syria, [www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria](http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria).

<sup>2</sup> "2015 UNHCR country operations profile—Iraq," UN Refugee Agency, [www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html).

As the realisation that the region's conflicts and refugee crises will be protracted sinks in locally and beyond, the tensions between communities have started rising all over the Levantine Middle East. This has especially affected Syrians trying to flee their country for, fearing the impact that the refugee population can have on their internal stability and the slow infiltration of ISIS fighters into their territories, all of the neighbouring countries have recently tightened or closed borders to the refugees. Such policies have left Syrians trapped inside a war zone or living in increasing legal insecurity in the neighbouring countries, while being perceived by host communities as an economic and security threat.

While the EU and some of its better off Member States have offered significant financial assistance, the total funds so far have not met the actual needs of the refugees and their hosts. The problems are structural and the needs are of a longer-term nature. The response needs to be diversified and tailored to these actual needs, including the need for engaging the human and social capital of the displaced population. Otherwise we risk losing several generations of well educated middle-class Syrians and their children, destabilising and setting back the successes achieved in Lebanon and Iraq, and creating a pool for radicalisation and new ISIS recruits. It is as much about relieving the immediate needs as it is about finding long-term solutions that would allow at least partial economical integration of the refugee populations. This briefing therefore proposes a three-pronged approach that combines (i) an increased and equitably shared EU effort to relieve the overall economical burden that they represent, (ii) dipping into the human capital of the refugee population and (iii) relieving the pressure of numbers by a structural effort to open EU borders for a much higher number of Syrian refugees than has been the case so far.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Problem: As if Sweden Moved to Poland**

Although refugees leaving Syria and Iraq have initially been able to find shelter in one of the four neighbouring countries or regions,<sup>4</sup> Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq began closing their borders to refugees in 2013, citing security, economical and societal concerns. The modalities of both hosting and closure differ per country.

In Turkey, the majority of more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees live outside 20 or so refugee camps, mainly in the larger cities along the Syrian border. They have not been given refugee status, and are referred to as "guests." Recent fighting for the Kurdish town of Kobane close to the Turkish border has caused a new influx, pushing the refugee figure closer to 1.7 million. Although a fairly large country with a comparatively strong economy, Turkey is struggling to respond to the needs of the exiled Syrians. Last month, the UN's refugee agency warned that the refugees could be without basic food, shelter and medication, if international donors do not increase their assistance to the country.<sup>5</sup>

But Turkey may also be one of the few among the host countries to recognise the long-term nature of the crisis, and the fact that the majority of the current refugees are likely to stay for a while. Moreover, it is the first country to actually try to tap into the refugees' potential and allow temporary Turkish IDs for purposes of legal access to the labour market.<sup>6</sup> Officially, Turkey continues to allow refugees from Syria to enter the country, but the borders are opened and closed according to security assessments, not always according to refugee needs—and only to those with valid passports. This autumn, for instance, the government of Turkey opened its border with Syria to allow people to flee fighting in Kobane. But the

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<sup>3</sup> At the UN conference in Geneva, third countries, including the EU, agreed to accept only 100,000 Syrian refugees, including the already accepted 62,000. This amounts to a mere 3% of the overall number of Syrian refugees. See: "Governments at Geneva meeting agree to take in 100,000 Syrian refugees," UNHCR, 9 December 2014, [www.unhcr.org/548737926.html](http://www.unhcr.org/548737926.html).

<sup>4</sup> The land border with Israel is closed and no Syrian refugees are registered in that country.

<sup>5</sup> K. Guilbert, "More Funds Needed for Million Syrian Refugees in Turkey: UNHCR," *Reuters*, 9 October 2014, [www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/09/us-foundation-syria-turkey-refugees-idUSKCN0HX1YC20141009](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/09/us-foundation-syria-turkey-refugees-idUSKCN0HX1YC20141009).

<sup>6</sup> "Turkish Gov't to Provide temporary ID Cards for Employment of Syrian Refugees," *Hurriyet*, 12 November 2014, [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-govt-to-provide-temporary-id-cards-for-employment-of-syrian-refugees.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74206&NewsCatID=347](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-govt-to-provide-temporary-id-cards-for-employment-of-syrian-refugees.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74206&NewsCatID=347).

border was opened irregularly, leaving people stranded on the other side for long periods of time and without any certainty as to their prospects of being allowed into the country.<sup>7</sup>

In Jordan, much like in Turkey, only 20% of about 600,000 registered refugees are housed in several small and two large UNHCR-run camps—Za’atari and Al-Azraq, both located away from inhabited centres. Inside the camps, the international organisations are providing shelter and education. The remaining 80% live in Jordanian cities. The assistance refugees receive is insufficient to cover their basic needs, and they as a rule compete with the poorest Jordanians for housing and manual, illegally obtained day jobs, creating localised rental price and labour market bubbles at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. Their presence also creates pressure on education and health systems, as well as on the overall infrastructure, especially water supplies.

Facing economical crisis, and increasing domestic pressures, the Jordanian government had by early 2013 introduced stricter limitations and control over the flow of people into the country. In its most recent report, Amnesty International has warned about tightening of the border regime, and the increasing number of cases of refugees being denied entry or sent back to Syria, including pregnant women and young children.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, between 4,000 and 5,000 people are waiting at informal crossing points, with little access to humanitarian assistance and protection, according to aid agencies.

But by far the greatest pressure is being experienced by the tiny Lebanon, whose population of 4.5 million has opened its doors to a staggering 1.1 million refugees, who have increased the overall population of Lebanon by 20% in the course of three years—the equivalent of the entire population of Sweden moving to Poland.

There are no camps in Lebanon, and refugees live among the population—renting on the already overcrowded housing market, competing for access to low-paid manual jobs, stretching the healthcare and education systems, and putting pressure on the already very poor infrastructure. Because of the relative size and speed of refugee influx, the country is experiencing a tangible economic impact from its hospitality. The World Bank estimated that by the end of this year, “some 170,000 additional Lebanese will be pushed into poverty, and an additional 220,000–324,000 will be rendered unemployed,” doubling the unemployment rate to 20%.<sup>9</sup>

All of this pressure is being brought to bear on a country with a long history of sectarian violence, whose fragile peace is being managed through a system of pillarised agreement of the Sunni, Shi’a and Christian minorities. This system has been inundated by more than a million of predominantly Sunni refugees—and although they do not have access to political decision making, their very presence increases tensions between communities. Much like the Palestinian case several decades ago, which led to a 15-year civil war, this creates a potential pool for the recruitment of future sectarian foot soldiers and further radicalisation.

Lebanon especially has been asking for increased support in order to maintain the service provision for the refugees. But it has also been requesting third countries to step up relocation and open their doors to the Syrian refugees, releasing the burden carried by the local population. In October 2014, Lebanon’s minister of social affairs declared that the country would no longer accept new refugees and the UN has since reported a 75–90% drop in registering them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, “Left Out in the Cold. Syrian Refugees Abandoned by the International Community,” London, 2014, [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> “Lebanon Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict,” World Bank, 20 September 2013, [www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/09/24/000333037\\_20130924111238/Rendered/PDF/810980LB0box379831B00P14754500PUBLIC0.pdf](http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/09/24/000333037_20130924111238/Rendered/PDF/810980LB0box379831B00P14754500PUBLIC0.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> “Lebanon Says It Won’t Accept More Syrian Refugees,” *Associated Press/Al-Arabiya*, 24 October 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/10/24/Lebanon-says-it-won-t-accept-more-Syrian-refugees.html>.

## The Response: Incubating Frustration or Hope?

The millions of refugees in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan have fled an armed conflict. Many of them may have thus developed strong political sympathies and antipathies. With the proximity to jihadi ideology, armed conflict, and protracted deprivation of basic means of living, it is probable that disenfranchised refugees will radicalise and take up arms. It is proven that refugee camps can be a threat if rebel groups reside in them, possibly even engaging in military operations.<sup>11</sup> A study conducted among Burundi refugees in Tanzania analysed the masculine identity and the coping mechanisms that men used to deal with the loss of their role of breadwinner for their families.<sup>12</sup> These people were described as “angry young men,” who were coping with losing their masculine roles. When not in camps, immigrants are subjected to different kinds of hardship, mainly economic, which tried their patience and sense of moderation. The men, who were used to holding a dominant position in society, found themselves in a situation stripped of their usual power. Refugee emasculation is a human security issue<sup>13</sup> with complex causes and consequences, including radicalisation.

If refugees remain unaided, this black scenario of incubating future extremists is all the more possible since at least two of the countries in which they found shelter—Lebanon and Jordan—can easily be destabilised. The influx of Sunni Palestinian refugees to Lebanon in 1950s and 60s became a direct cause of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), as it ended the Christian demographic domination. The current number of refugees in Lebanon tilts the scale again towards the Sunni population, aggravating the delicate religious balance in a country that has since 1990 several times come to the brink of civil war. Likewise in Jordan, the majority of population is Palestinian or of Palestinian refugee origin, also as a result of fallout of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Jordanian government has been wise to incorporate the Palestinians into the new state structure, but the feeling of discrimination against them (such as in employment in public institutions) has remained. The mass of Syrian refugees makes the already divided Jordanians uneasy and increases internal tensions. Only close cooperation with the governments of Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, together with international organisations, can formulate effective policies towards the refugees in the Middle East and help assuage these fears. But these policies, apart from careful structuring and clever tailoring, also need money.

The full scale of suffering that has engulfed the Levantine Middle East is not equally present in the public discourse of all EU Member States and, more importantly, in their policy-making and their responses to the crisis. While some western and northern EU members have offered tangible financial assistance to the displaced Syrians and their host countries, the rest have been reticent in sharing this burden of EU solidarity.

Only 12 EU countries have given more than mere 0.003% of their GDP to Iraqi and Syrian refugees in the Middle East between 2011 and 2014 (see table below). But the EU has still fallen over €40 million short of its financial pledges for 2014. More than half of EU Member States do not see the necessity to help, even though the worst humanitarian crisis of this century so far is unfolding in our nearest vicinity, with the potential to threaten the European territory directly. The UK and Germany are leading the donor list, having pledged \$147 million and \$103 million respectively.<sup>14</sup> Denmark, Luxembourg and Sweden have also offered substantial help as a percentage of their GDP. However, as many as 10 EU countries have not contributed at all, while another five have offered symbolic help, if calculated as a percentage of GDP. If this trend continues, the refugee crisis will undoubtedly worsen.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E.Y. Krivenko. “Hospitality and Sovereignty: What Can We Learn From the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program?” *International Journal of Refugee Law*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 579–602.

<sup>12</sup> S. Turner, “Angry Young Men in Camps: Gender, Age and Class Relations among Burundian Refugees in Tanzania,” Centre for Documentation and Research, UNHCR, June 1999.

<sup>13</sup> B. Lukunka, “New Big Men: Refugee Emasculation as a Human Security Issue,” *International Migration*, vol. 50 (5), 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Syrian Arab Republic Emergencies for 2014. Total Humanitarian Funding per Donor in 2014, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 8 December 2014, [http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha\\_R24c\\_C206\\_Y2014\\_asof\\_\\_\\_1412040301.pdf](http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24c_C206_Y2014_asof___1412040301.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> For example the UN World Food Programme had already stop activities in Syrian refugee camps due to funds shortage. S. Jones, “1.7m Syrian Refugees Face Food Crisis as UN Funds Dry Up,” *The Guardian*, 1 December 2014, [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/01/syrian-refugees-food-crisis-un-world-programme](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/01/syrian-refugees-food-crisis-un-world-programme).

Ignoring the refugee crisis is short-sighted. It may ultimately amount to breeding jihadism at Europe's gates. But it is still not too late for a better response. Statistics show that there has not been yet an irreversible criminalisation of refugee life. According to official Turkish numbers, in 2013 the 1.2 million Syrian refugees there have only committed some 5,000 illegal acts (0.4 % of all offences in 2013).<sup>16</sup> Also, reports show that support for ISIS on social media is not yet particularly high in countries where refugees reside. It is only 7.6% in Syria and 19.7% in Iraq, in comparison with 47.6% in Qatar.<sup>17</sup> The radical ideology may not yet be present in the camps, nor outside them, but time is a crucial factor in avoiding radicalisation. An analysis of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan showed that it was not the size of the refugee population but the duration of the displacement that seemed to be the critical factor for the radicalisation and militarisation of refugees.<sup>18</sup>

Refugees should not only be seen as a future threat, but also as an opportunity for Europe to extend its outreach. Experts found that, in order not to drive refugees into the arms of terrorist groups, the following lessons should be learnt: avoiding mixing humanitarian with military assistance, avoiding making refugee camps a de facto permanent solution, engaging refugees in the planning and administration of the camps, finding them work within the camps, engaging women, and focusing on education (including political education). Of these, access to education may be seen as the most powerful tool in refugee camps as regards reducing radicalisation and recruitment to terrorist organisations.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, crisis situations give the international community a rare opportunity to educate a population once subject to poor or propagandist teaching.

Looking at refugees as a source of potential rather than as a liability can also become a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. When refugees are primarily perceived as a threat that needs to be contained, border police and the military play a major role in formulating refugee-related policies, often radicalising them further. However, when economic development is the government's primary concern, development players influence the policy towards refugees, changing it positively, for example by way of incorporating the refugee potential into the market.<sup>20</sup> A refugee population that has experienced relatively undisrupted access to education, has participated in the labour market, and has developed new skills, could later play an important role in the post-war reconstruction of Syria. A recent study showed that when migrants return to their country of origin, they generate wealth, invest, and create employment.<sup>21</sup>

The EU countries, especially those pondering an exact target for their funds so as to be certain that the money is well spent, should consider either investing in development and adjustments of the labour markets, especially in Lebanon, to assist with their capacity to use the refugees' skillset or finance educational programmes. It is of crucial importance not to lose the human capital of those already well-educated Syrians who have been forced to flee in the midst of their tertiary education—and to create programmes that will allow them to attend universities in the host countries, or in Europe. It is just as important to open the high-skill end of the labour market for them in the region and outside it.

As for all EU Member States, refugee quotas and resettlements programmes prioritising young Syrians, should be increased. Moreover, the EU needs to make sure that all Syrian residents, including Palestinian refugees from Syria, have equal access to resettlement programmes. Above all, however, all EU Member States need to timely and fully contribute to the UN-managed Syria Strategic Response Plans such as SHARP and RRP. As and if the crisis continues, perhaps a minimum level of refugee aid (calculated on the

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<sup>16</sup> "Crime Rate among Syrian Refugees Remain Way Lower than Expected," *Turkey Agenda*, 22 September 2014, [www.turkeyagenda.com/crime-rate-among-syrian-refugees-remain-way-lower-than-expected-1199.html](http://www.turkeyagenda.com/crime-rate-among-syrian-refugees-remain-way-lower-than-expected-1199.html).

<sup>17</sup> S. Malik, "Support for Isis Stronger in Arabic Social Media in Europe than in Syria," *The Guardian*, 20 November 2014, [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/28/support-isis-stronger-arabic-social-media-europe-us-than-syria](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/28/support-isis-stronger-arabic-social-media-europe-us-than-syria).

<sup>18</sup> S. Schmeidl, "(Human) Security Dilemmas: Long-term Implications of the Afghan Refugee crisis," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 7–29.

<sup>19</sup> F. Martin-Rayo, "Countering Radicalization in Refugee Camps: How Education Can Help Defeat AQAP," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, June 2011.

<sup>20</sup> K.L. Sang, "Security, Economy and the Modes of Refugees' Livelihood Pursuit: Focus on Karen Refugees in Thailand," *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2014, pp. 461–479.

<sup>21</sup> J. Wahba, "Return Migration in South Mediterranean Countries: Determinants, Impact and Policy Implications," *FEMISE*, April 2014, [www.femise.org/wp-content/force-download.php?file=uploads/2014/06/FEM3420-Final-with-COVER3.pdf](http://www.femise.org/wp-content/force-download.php?file=uploads/2014/06/FEM3420-Final-with-COVER3.pdf).

basis of percentage of GDP or otherwise), and a minimum resettlement quota for each Member State, ought to be discussed.

Making a case for greater help for the refugees is often taken as non-realist, naïve wishful thinking. A refugee crisis of this size however calls for courage and vision; it is not only a test for European values, it also poses a great challenge to human security, to the stability of countries where refugees find shelter, and to the future safety of Europe as a whole. The importance of the human factor in defeating ISIS is explicitly acknowledged by the U.S. military. In his 13 November Congress hearing, General Martin Dempsey, the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair, explained that “the end state is defined as the defeat of ISIL [ed. ISIS] (...) that will occur when the 20 million disenfranchised Sunnis that live between Damascus and Baghdad reject that ideology.”<sup>22</sup> The ocean of refugees that is growing around the island of Europe may produce more anti-European extremists in the future. Europe has always won hearts and minds by its soft, inclusive powers. It is time to use them again, and show solidarity in response from all European states alike.

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<sup>22</sup> “U.S. Strategy against ISIS,” *C-Span*, 13 November 2014, [www.c-span.org/video/?322642-1/hearing-us-strategy-isis](http://www.c-span.org/video/?322642-1/hearing-us-strategy-isis).

	Country	Aid for Syrian refugees 2011–2014 (USD)*	Aid for Iraqi refugees 2014 (USD)**	Total (USD)	GDP in USD (2014)***	Aid as % of GDP	Country ranking acc. to aid as % of GDP
2	United Kingdom	855,767,694	42,102,405	897,870,099	2,522,260,000,000	0.03560	2
5	Germany	637,070,535	219,280,090	856,350,625	3,634,820,000,000	0.02356	5
6	Netherlands	107,338,781	57,201,130	164,539,911	800,170,000,000	0.02056	6
4	Sweden	122,080,170	39,253,203	161,333,373	557,940,000,000	0.02892	4
1	Denmark	108,988,410	16,649,076	125,637,486	330,810,000,000	0.03798	1
12	Italy	66,963,296	7,379,916	74,343,212	2,071,310,000,000	0.00359	12
13	France	65,141,789	5,808,687	70,950,476	2,734,950,000,000	0.00259	13
7	Finland	39,432,941	1,358,696	40,791,637	256,840,000,000	0.01588	7
8	Ireland	31,996,197	2,527,800	34,523,997	217,820,000,000	0.01585	8
10	Belgium	31,738,407	-	31,738,407	508,120,000,000	0.00625	10
15	Spain	24,559,880	668,449	25,228,329	1,358,260,000,000	0.00186	15
3	Luxembourg	16,252,475	1,547,818	17,800,293	60,380,000,000	0.02948	3
11	Austria	12,549,484	3,720,556	16,270,040	415,840,000,000	0.00391	11
19	Poland	5,111,576	32,216	5,143,792	517,540,000,000	0.00099	19
14	Czech Rep.	3,451,734	581,390	4,033,124	198,450,000,000	0.00203	14
9	Estonia	1,708,953	341,293	2,050,246	24,480,000,000	0.00838	9
20	Hungary	735,151	146,153	881,304	126,000,000,000	0.00070	20
16	Croatia	847,141	-	847,141	57,540,000,000	0.00147	16
17	Bulgaria	618,870	-	618,870	53,010,000,000	0.00117	17
24	Romania	500,000	-	500,000	189,640,000,000	0.00026	24
27	Portugal	433,702	-	433,702	219,960,000,000	0.00020	27

28	Greece	394,223	-	394,223	241,720,000,000	0.00016	28
25	Slovakia	199,331	-	199,331	91,600,000,000	0.00022	25
22	Slovenia	196,634	-	196,634	45,470,000,000	0.00043	22
21	Latvia	124,715	63,532	188,247	28,370,000,000	0.00066	21
23	Lithuania	162,738	-	162,738	42,250,000,000	0.00039	23
18	Malta	99,385	-	99,385	8,720,000,000	0.00114	18
26	Cyprus	45,597	-	45,597	22,980,000,000	0.00020	26
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,134,509,809</b>	<b>398,598,878</b>	<b>2,533,172,219</b>	<b>17,337,250,000,000</b>		
	<b>European Commission</b>	<b>1,134,259,669</b>	<b>34,373,000</b>	<b>1,168,632,669</b>	<b>17,337,250,000,000</b>		
	<b>Total with EC</b>	<b>3,268,769,478</b>	<b>432,971,878</b>	<b>3,701,804,888</b>	<b>17,337,250,000,000</b>	<b>0.0213</b>	

European Union Member State aid for Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

\* UN OCHA as of November 2014.

\*\* UN OCHA as of December 2014.

\*\*\* [www.tradingeconomics.com](http://www.tradingeconomics.com).