



Managing Refugee Arrivals, an EU Citizen Alternative

Looking at the European agenda, controlling migration is still considered a high-ranking [topic](#); there is an unchanged pressure to further reduce the number of arrivals to the European Union. Currently, differences in the presence of asylum seekers between EU member states are huge. Greece, Italy and Spain, the few countries where most refugees arrive, are unable to provide adequate aid to all people showing up at their borders. This is the main reason why many refugees do not want to stay there and, instead, try to continue their journey to a small number of destination countries such as Germany and Sweden, where they expect to find a better future. But, since the arrival and destination countries would like to split their efforts of supporting refugees with the other EU member states, a new policy is [expected](#) to be introduced during the current Council of the European Union presidency of Germany.

However, at the same time, Europe will have to find solutions to [regularly](#) welcome refugees as part of its global responsibility and cannot postpone their resettlement until irregular migration is curbed. Yet, the strong imbalances between EU member states will make it very challenging to spread people evenly. Therefore, Refival proposes an alternative solution for accepting newcomers, which is based on treating refugees as temporary European citizens rather than on organizing their equal distribution.

Although details of the EU proposals are still [unknown](#), it is very likely that the main [priorities](#) will address increased border protection, preliminary fast-track examination of asylum eligibility at or outside of the EU borders, strengthening the cooperation with countries of origin considered to be safe to return to, and addressing human trafficking criminality. All of these measures are intended to reduce the number of people entering Europe irregularly.

Nevertheless, as said before, reducing the number of migrants entering its borders does not free Europe from morally taking its fair share of responsibility for the millions of displaced people worldwide. It should therefore, for example, resettle substantially more refugees from Turkey or similar host countries which cannot sufficiently support people, especially when their economies are in turmoil. Related to this, the primary target of aid should not be limited to just offering shelter whilst purposelessly making people wait for years in refugee camps or letting them be exploited as cheap informal labor. The only acceptable goal, in Refival's opinion, is to offer refugees the chance to rebuild their lives and achieve a new sustainable future.

A complicating factor for this is that EU member states [differ](#) greatly in their economic development and employment potential, which, in practice, leads to a situation where asylum seekers try to reach the more advanced, richer, European areas. The result is [imbalance](#); a few areas attract far too many asylum seekers, while most others attract none. However, the privileged locations are usually having much higher living costs, which implies that supplying welfare to refugees at these places is significantly more expensive than elsewhere. Spreading people more evenly over all EU member states could thus strongly increase Europe's total capacity for refugee integration, but only if access to employment is also more equally spread. Thus, the question is whether there are options to better balance the presence of a larger number of refugees and optimize cost, without letting social support depending people concentrate in the most developed regions or having them placed in less advanced areas with no future.

Refival proposes an alternative framework. It envisions that status holding refugees are considered potential future European citizens and therefore will, from the beginning, get the same freedom of movement rights as European citizens. This means that refugees can freely move between EU countries as long as they find formal employment at their destination. Following this European citizen logic, refugees could initially be located anywhere, regardless of whether the host country is poor or rich, or the setting is urban or [rural](#). As long as newcomers get the chance and support to [learn](#) the skills needed to integrate and to [find jobs](#) somewhere, they would not get stuck and would acquire the potential to move from their initial geographical starting point to any location where they could optimally function in the European society. Such a position would be fully equal to that of native European citizens, who can also only relocate if they can find employment elsewhere.

To implement the described logic, Refival [proposes](#) to separate three stages of refugee integration: Shelter, Adaptation and Participation. Upon arrival, Shelter would be a “first-aid” stage in which provisional accommodation is provided. This stage should be kept as short as possible. Offering Shelter would be followed by an Adaptation stage, which currently takes [5 years](#) on average and largely depends on the education and skills refugees already possess. Learning a new [language](#) is often one of the main challenges during this period. But also intensive [interaction](#) with and [acceptance](#) of basic European values are required as part of the process of becoming a temporary or permanent European citizen. Finally, Adaptation is expected to be followed by Participation, meaning that full connection with their new European environment has been established and refugees start to financially contribute to Europe’s economy.

Adaptation requires investment in people, whereas Participation is the return on this investment. If these two integration stages are geographically split and located in two different EU member states it is more correct to fund the Adaptation of refugees from a collective European budget than from the one of the host country. This means that, different from the currently practice, funding would be centralized and, instead of the host countries or communities, all EU members would collectively finance the facilities and services provided to refugees.

The big advantage of such centralized funding is that for many deprived European areas, educating or reskilling people for an average period of 5 years could mean a reversal of the aging of their population. Whereas providing the above services to refugees would also bring a welcome [diversification](#) of economic activities. This can be a strong catalyst for regaining economic sustainability, especially in the case of small [rural](#) communities in need of structural revitalization or for other areas or countries from where too many young native people have migrated [inside](#) of the EU over the past decades.

Regardless of whether refugees choose to stay at their initial location or move on to another European destination by learning the required language and skills, refugees being supported under this scheme would [contribute](#) and be part of the local economy for at least 5 years on average. Finally, being a financially attractive and beneficent proposition for economically deprived areas, the current resistance of a number of European member states to accept refugees may disappear and communities may actively start seeking to welcome refugees. This way, spreading asylum seekers over EU member states could become fully voluntary instead of [forced](#) by quota or “financial punishment”.

Having developed a number of detailed conceptual frameworks and intensively advocated these propositions since 2015, Refival is urgently seeking for possibilities to get involved in implementing its vision. Therefore, if you are aware of any potential stakeholders or projects, please get in touch with [me](#). Together, we can transform the lives of displaced people by providing citizenship, shaping a sustainable future for refugees and for Europe.

Kind Regards,

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