



From Welfare to Work: Resettling Refugees to become European Citizens

A time bomb is ticking for the [6](#) million Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries of Syria. With [political initiatives](#) on the way to organize their “[voluntary return](#)” and with [Turkey](#), [Lebanon](#) and [Jordan](#) in turmoil, they may get trapped and feel forced to escape “[illegally](#)” to Europe.

Although Europe absorbed about [1](#) million Syrian refugees from 2011-2017, in 2019 it received only [75,000](#) people, which is less than the number of Syrian babies [born](#) in Turkey during that year.

Since the new EU migration [pact](#) proposal targets to further reduce or stop [irregular](#) migration, there is an urgent need for [resettlements](#) and complementary [pathways](#) as legal entry alternatives. However, looking at [30,000](#) family reunifications, [20,000](#) resettlements and a [few](#) thousand community [sponsorships](#) of Syrians in 2019, the numbers are far too low to cause any relief for Syria’s neighbors.

Currently, the Syrian asylum seekers who irregularly [arrive](#) at Europe’s borders are more often male, young, entrepreneurial, and wealthy enough to pay smugglers. Their arrival after a dangerous journey is based on “survival of the fittest” rather than on their vulnerability. For “[regular](#)” refugee resettlements or arrivals to Europe via complementary pathways, a very different selection [mechanism](#) is used. Since Europe cannot help all [80](#) million displaced people worldwide, eligibility [criteria](#) are applied, after which selected people can safely and officially travel to Europe.

An important contrast between those arriving irregularly and those to be potentially selected is a difference in mindset. Whereas irregular migrants usually exclusively target to reach their specific favorite destination in Germany or Sweden, most refugees presently residing in Syria’s neighboring countries do not possess such clear aspirations. This means that they are much more open to relocating to EU areas that up till now have [not](#) received any displaced people.

A related distinction is that irregular migrants often travel individually, whereas, in the case of relocation via complementary pathways, families mostly move together. This difference is important for transfers to and integration in more rural areas. Here, newcomers cannot count on already established compatriot communities and will thus socially have to rely more on their families. This does not have to be negative though, as a resulting stronger need for interaction with locals can [facilitate](#) integration.

In respect to refugee adaptability in Europe, there are [roughly estimated](#) three segments of people: -1- Educated or entrepreneurial refugees (10-20%), -2- Refugees with interrupted education (30-40%) and -3- Relatively uneducated refugees (50%). The present “general” experience is that on average it takes [5](#) years for the current mix of these three groups to culturally adapt and find employment.

If people are well educated and already speak a foreign language or have sufficient qualifications and experience in a recognized profession, adaptation can often be achieved in as little as 1-2 years. For people with interrupted education and skills deficits, this usually takes longer, namely around 5 years. However, for non-educated refugees, it can take decades to adapt and in many cases, only their children will succeed. The uneducated, already adult, resettled parents will often remain disconnected from their host community.

Although it is very tempting to concentrate on relocating educated refugee families, these are actually not the most vulnerable group. Usually they face better employment possibilities compared to others, regardless of where they live. Further, these are the people who are often needed to [support](#) their local companions, and finally, they are also the ones that, after conflict is resolved, would be able to contribute to rebuilding their home country the most. Assimilation of this group in Europe can thus easily lead to brain drain for their communities.

A focus on uneducated refugee families – on the other hand – often does not cause much relief. This group, in general, faces non-bridgeable gaps in adapting to a new culture. Both at their present location and at their country of resettlement, nothing more than shelter can be offered. Thus, as long as they are presently safe and their housing and medical support are appropriate, people are socially mostly (due to smaller cultural differences) better off in a country in the region of origin than in Europe. Improvement of their situation can be much more easily accomplished by enhancing their current living conditions, education opportunities and employment perspectives than by relocation.

The middle group of refugees remains, namely those with bridgeable education and skills gaps. Serving this group adds the most value and comes closest to one of the UNHCR [criteria](#) for resettlement, more specifically, offering a durable solution at the resettlement destination country and replacing a lack of perspective in their existing situation. It means to offer refugees or refugee families the opportunity to [adapt](#) and economically participate in a new community instead of structurally staying welfare-dependent where they are located right now.

In order to help the above people, Refival proposes to create a new additional resettlement scheme named [SPIRRIT](#) (Sustainable Population Increase via Refugee Resettlement and Internet-based Transformation). SPIRRIT offers refugees with resolvable skills deficits the chance to rebuild their lives in Europe and obtain a route to improve their social and economic mobility.

SPIRRIT considers refugees to be potential European citizens and therefore [proposes](#), immediately from their arrival, to grant people the same freedom of movement rights as European citizens possess. This means that refugee families can freely move between EU countries as long as they are self-supporting and find formal employment at their destination. Following this European citizen logic, refugees could initially be placed anywhere, regardless of whether the EU host country is [poor](#) or [rich](#), or their setting is [urban](#) or [rural](#).

SPIRRIT aims to use this initial geographical refugee location freedom to synergetically address [demographics](#). Europe is [ageing](#) rapidly and faces a strong need for young people to replace those who retire, especially in its deprived or rural areas, where most of the youth has meanwhile left.

SPIRRIT focuses on the integration of newcomers wherever they are welcome and needed. Technically, many types of education and employment can meanwhile be [remotely](#) executed via Internet. [Incubation](#) of refugees can thus be realized anywhere via distance [learning](#), while necessary work-experience can be gained through performing Internet-based tasks or jobs in local co-working centers. By structurally combining these two elements, skills development on-demand can be facilitated and, cost-effectively, offered to or by companies. This way, for example, non-agricultural and non-handicrafts based activities can be added to a rural economy in order to regain self-sustainability.

SPIRRIT is a multi-stakeholder approach. It requires EU or other public funding of the refugee's subsistence cost during their 5 years of adaptation. It demands from the receiving community to facilitate and be interactively engaged with the people arriving and assist them to successfully integrate. Finally, it asks the private sector to become intensively involved in the education of their future workers and to create the educational programs and apprenticeships needed. This way people are enabled to afterward achieve [enrollment](#) in stable employment, without anyone left behind.

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

Kind Regards,

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