

# Arguments for and against letting more refugees into Europe

## Arguments for

### 1. VALUES MATTER

As Europe's Post-War unity, democracy and basic rights come under unprecedented threat, we need more than ever to stand up for our values. Compassion, solidarity, respect for the needy and for minorities, and application of the rule of law are vital. The Geneva Convention on Refugees and other international agreements clearly commit European governments to respect and protect refugees. Violation of such commitments undermines international law and respect for a rules-based world order. Failure to protect families threatened by war, massacre and oppression will erode core values at the heart of European civilisation.

### 2. REAL SECURITY

The idea that shutting out refugees will bolster Europe's security is a dangerous illusion. Closing the door to those fleeing violence will increase antagonism, alienation and anti-Western sentiment. Abandoning refugees to kick their heels in Middle Eastern camps will allow resentment to fester and increase the risk they fall prey to extremist recruiters. Ensuring their integration into European society, providing training and opportunities will reduce the danger of them turning to the dark side. Many will eventually return home with an understanding and respect for European values and help build new societies there. Daesh is trying to smuggle operatives into Europe among refugees from Syria, so vigilance is needed, but an over-reaction will be counter-productive. Almost all jihadi terror attacks in Europe have been planned and executed by European citizens or residents. In the United States, the number of refugees admitted since 1980 is 3 million; the number implicated in a fatal terrorist attack since then is zero.

### 3. ECONOMICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1960, nations now making up the European Union had an average birth-rate of 2.6. In 2014, the rate had dropped to 1.4 children per woman, well below the 2.1 needed to keep the population from decline. Europe's native population is shrinking fast. That means a declining workforce has to support more older people. The EU's old-age dependency ratio is projected to rise from 27.8% to 50.1% by 2060. There are four solutions: persuade European women to have a lot more babies; raise retirement ages so we all keep working longer; increase taxes to pay pensions; or bring in more migrants. Refugees arriving in Europe are mostly young, willing to do work natives shun and equipped with skills the job market needs. History is full of refugees making successful contributions to their host countries – from successive waves of Europeans fleeing to the United States to escape persecution, to Vietnamese boat people in Australia, or Ugandan Asians in the UK. When the latter group fled to Britain in the 1970s, the reaction from many resembled today's anti-refugee hysteria. Forty years later, a former teenage refugee turned businessman and legislator told parliament how Britons with south Asian roots make up 2.5% of the UK population but contribute 10% of its national output.

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## Arguments against

### 1. BETTER FOR THEM TO STAY CLOSE TO HOME

One day, peace will return to Syria, Iraq and other nations whose citizens are fleeing war and oppression. When that day comes, those countries will need the refugees to return and rebuild. The more refugees become settled down far from their homelands, the less likely they will go back to join that vital reconstruction effort. Before the war, Syria had 31,000 doctors. Now more than half are believed to have fled, many treating patients in Europe. Iraq complains of a serious brain drain as its skilled young professionals form the vanguard of those seeking a new life in the West. Rather than welcoming refugees for re-settlement in Europe, governments should be investing in the long-term future of countries like Syria and Iraq by working for peace and security there, and increasing support for refugees camped in neighbouring countries. We should ensure they have decent living conditions with access to training, education and work opportunities to prepare for the day when they can return to rebuild their homelands.

### 2. IT'S A RECRUITMENT CALL FOR POPULISTS

Welcoming refugees is unpopular with voters. Letting more of them in is a gift for the demagogues challenging Europe's democratic order. Voter unease with Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcome for refugees has fuelled support for the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. It scored significant successes in five state elections in 2016 by riding public angst over refugees, and threatens to become the biggest opposition party after September's general election. Germany is not alone: populists across much of Europe and beyond have touted the spectre of refugees as terrorists, sex pests, disease carriers, threats to gay rights, Christian values, the welfare state and just about anything else that might win them votes. At a time when Europe's democracy is facing grave dangers, the refugee influx must be curbed to reduce the risk of a lurch to the far-right.

### 3. EUROPE CAN'T COPE

Europe is full. The European Union registered 1.2 million first-time asylum seekers in 2015, and a further 954,000 over the first nine months of 2016. It is simply too many. Our social services, housing departments, health systems and schools can't cope with any more. The influx is concentrated in certain places, creating local tensions, and strains within communities. The absence of a workable re-distribution scheme within the EU, and the unwillingness of refugees to relocate, means some countries and regions are unfairly burdened – Germany and Sweden in particular. The arguments over where to locate incoming refugees places undue pressure on European solidarity. With Britain preparing to split and euro-hostile parties on the rise in other countries, the very fabric of the EU is under threat. It would be foolish to add to those strains by importing more refugees.