European Migration Crisis

Should the EU open its doors wider?

Members of the European Union (EU) are feeling besieged by a rising tide of refugees fleeing conflict and migrants seeking economic opportunity. Many of the refugees, who are mainly from the Middle East and Africa, are crossing the Mediterranean on overloaded boats or traveling via treacherous land routes, often victimized by unscrupulous human traffickers. National leaders disagree on what to do, other than fortify Europe's borders. Refugee organizations say strengthened borders will just push migrants, who have been dying by the thousands, to try even more dangerous routes. An EU plan to send navies to destroy smugglers' boats faces similar criticism. Some economists argue that Europe needs more migrants to bolster its aging workforce. However, polls show most Europeans want fewer immigrants amid worries about unemployment and terrorism. Violent conflicts far from Europe — primarily the Syrian civil war — are driving this year's surge. That leads some observers to argue that an international solution to the migration crisis is needed.

A man clings to the rope ladder from a cargo ship that rescued him and other migrants on a sinking rubber boat in the Mediterranean Sea between Libya and Sicily on May 3, 2015. More than 220,000 migrants and refugees have entered Europe by land or sea so far this year.

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European Migration Crisis

BY SARAH GLAZER

Sixteen-year-old Said, a Somalian, was handed over to traffickers last summer by his parents, who have eight other children, in hopes he could reach relatives in Norway. Armed smugglers at the Libyan border imprisoned Said for nine months while his parents raised the money for his journey, he told the Washington-based Save the Children advocacy group. Then the smugglers beat him to force him onto an overloaded fishing trawler headed for Italy.  

Said was one of only 28 survivors among the trawler’s estimated 800 passengers when the boat sank on April 19, after hitting a rescue ship. It was the deadliest incident ever recorded in the Mediterranean Sea. 

Migrants had paid between $700 and $7,000 for the crossing — with a place on the top deck carrying the highest price. For many, that meant the difference between life and death. The passengers below deck were locked inside with no means of escape, according to some survivors. 

Humanitarian groups are calling the Mediterranean migration route to Europe the world’s deadliest, with more than 1,900 deaths so far this year, more than twice the toll during the same period in 2014. The flood of people seeking haven in Europe is part of a worldwide exodus that the United Nations calls the worst refugee crisis since World War II. The crisis intensified on July 29, when hundreds of migrants stormed the Eurotunnel train terminal in Calais, France, for the second night in a row in attempts to board trains to England. (See p. 664.)

The four-year-old civil war in Syria has been the single biggest driver of the surge — more than 4 million have fled the conflict, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Syrians made up a third of those crossing the Mediterranean in the first six months of this year, the largest group by country of origin, followed by Afghans and Eritreans. 

European governments have vacillated between viewing the refugee surge as a humanitarian disaster worthy of sympathy or an invasion that must be stopped. At a summit meeting in June, the 28-member European Union (EU) could not agree on a mandatory allocation plan by which nations would have to take in 40,000 asylum-seekers * from Syria and Eritrea who had reached Greece and Italy after April 15.

The flow of people into Europe not only has raised questions about how to help refugees fleeing war or persecution; it also has raised the perennial question of how many migrants Europe needs for its economy. Debate rages in many places over migration’s impact and whether migrants will boost the economy or harm it by taking jobs from natives, lowering wages and overloading social services and housing.

A string of terrorist attacks since 2001 has made Europeans nervous about immigrants from Muslim countries, a fear underlined after the lethal January attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a kosher grocery store in Paris by gunmen linked to Islamic militant groups in Yemen. However, all three gunmen were French, born and raised in Paris.

Popular anxiety has helped fuel the rise of anti-immigrant parties in Europe, notably in Denmark and Finland. European governments have vacillated between viewing the surge as a humanitarian disaster worthy of sympathy and an invasion that must be stopped. Terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists have boosted support for the nationalists. Many human rights advocates say Europeans’ offers to take in refugees are inadequate.

* An asylum-seeker is a person seeking safety from persecution or serious harm who is awaiting a decision on an application for refugee status under national and international law.
The refugee surge shows no signs of abating. In the first six months of this year, more than 220,000 migrants and refugees were detected illegally crossing into Europe, approaching the 280,000 in all of 2014, which was already a record year, according to Ewa Moncure, press officer for Frontex, the European Union’s border agency. On the sea route from Turkey to Greece, the number of migrants increased 613 percent from the same period last year; the route from Greece through the Balkan countries of the former Yugoslavia saw a 962 percent increase, according to Frontex. (See map, above.) Moncure calls the increases in each of the past two years “quite dramatic,” because illegal migration had averaged only about 100,000 a year over the previous five years.  

Yet EU officials in Brussels emphasize that the migrants total less than 1 percent of the continent’s 500 million inhabitants and are a tiny number com-
pared to the millions of Syrians who have fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan — the three countries where 90 percent of Syria’s refugees have gone. 13

And so far, the number of illegal migrants this year is only about 6 percent of the annual flow of all migrants to the EU. 14 (In 2013, the most recent year for which official statistics are available, migration totaled 3.4 million, and about half of these immigrants were citizens of another EU country. 15)

It is “well within the European Union’s means” to take in 1 million refugees displaced by the Syrian and other conflicts over the next few years, according to François Crépeau, the U.N. special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. 16 Antonio Guterres, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees, has scolded Europe for taking in less than 4 percent of Syrian refugees. “Never was so little done by so many for so few. . . . Person for person, the wealthy EU is offering refuge to 1,000 times fewer Syrians than cash-strapped Lebanon,” he wrote last year. 17

Although international experts and diplomats at the U.N. may downplay the magnitude of the refugee problem for Europe, national leaders must answer to their constituents. Polls show that many Europeans want immigration to their country reduced, with majorities of 80 percent or more expressing that sentiment in the Mediterranean border nations of Italy and Greece, and more than half in the U.K. and France. 18

Those who come principally to find work, often dubbed “economic migrants,” account for close to half of those crossing the sea, estimates Arezo Malakooti, director of migration research for Altai Consulting, a Paris-based consulting firm, and author of a recent study of Mediterranean migrants for the International Organization for Migration, an intergovernmental organization with 127 member states that works for humane migration.

“The real question is what to do with irregular [illegal] migrants who don’t qualify for protection” as refugees, says Malakooti. “Most won’t leave voluntarily when asked to. They have gone through great . . . dangers to get to Europe.” Often they disappear to work in the black market, she says, where they are vulnerable to exploitation and are more likely to engage in criminal activity.

According to Human Rights Watch, while many migrants who come from countries such as Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal and Mali are seeking to improve their economic opportunities, some also may have endured human-rights violations and could have valid refugee claims. 19

Pledging to strengthen borders has been Europe’s typical response to unwanted migration. After the catastrophic sinking of Said’s boat in April, the EU tripled spending for Frontex’s search-and-rescue operations involving migrant boats and stepped up patrols of Europe’s external borders. This summer the EU is more closely monitoring migrant boats in the Mediterranean’s international waters, the first phase of a controversial military strategy to break up human smuggling rings.

But the migrant crisis has exposed divisions among the countries within Europe and especially within the Schengen area, a 26-country region that allows travelers to enter any of its member countries without showing a passport. Countries along the Schengen area’s borders, such as Hungary, have been overwhelmed this year with migrants trying to reach other countries in Europe. Hungary’s president announced plans to build a 13-foot-high fence on its border with Serbia (which is outside the Schengen area), while France and Austria have stepped up border patrols against refugees attempting to leave Italy.

Some experts say tighter borders only push migrants to use riskier routes at extortionist prices. “We see smuggling networks getting stronger and stronger because the more you reinforce a border with patrols, the more [refugees] are in need of assistance from professional smugglers,” and that creates a market, says Ruben Andersson, an anthropologist at the London School of Economics and author of a 2014 book about illegal immigration to Europe, Illegality, Inc. “Smugglers are service providers.”

Refugee Deaths Rising in 2015

More than 2,000 refugees and migrants died through July 29 this year while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. In April, 1,265 died in separate incidents when overloaded boats sank while traveling from Libya to Europe.

Refugee and Migrant Fatalities in the Mediterranean Sea, by Month, 2014 and 2015*

* Through July 29

Despite heart-rending photographs of refugees crammed into unseaworthy or overcrowded boats, the single biggest entry point for migrants is much less dramatic — international airports. Most illegal immigrants arrive on a legal visa and then fail to leave, according to Frontex. 20

Politicians such as British Prime Minister David Cameron say the key is to make it clear to these immigrants before they come that they will be found and sent home. Right now, most migrants believe that once they reach the Continent, they can easily slip across Europe’s unguarded national borders and either apply for asylum in their country of choice or slip into the underground economy, says Demetrios Papademetriou, president of the Migration Policy Institute Europe, a think tank in Brussels.

To counter that, “you have to say, ‘Guess what? We’ll find you, we’ll deport you; you will have lost thousands of dollars, and you will go back to the end of line,’ “ he says.

Like many other experts, Papademetriou believes Europe must streamline its asylum system to render decisions more quickly so that those who do not qualify for asylum can be immediately deported. It can take years for asylum-seekers to get a decision on their applications in both Germany, which takes one of the highest numbers of asylum-seekers in the EU, and in Britain, which takes fewer.

Some experts say the root cause of the crisis can be traced to chaos in countries where Western governments have interfered militarily. In 2011, for example, a NATO bombing campaign helped rebels in Libya overthrow dictator Moammar Gadhafi. 21 “Who put the mess in the region if not the coalition that went to Iraq and then Libya?” asks historian Patrick Weil, an immigration expert at the University of Paris. He thinks a broader international agreement is needed so that other countries, including the United States and Canada, take in refugees.

Weil sees a second reason for getting the international community involved: “Europe is paralyzed because it’s very difficult to change anything in the EU regulations — it takes many months of conversation.” Moving beyond Europe, Weil says, holds the potential to finding a solution that is both international and effective.

As Europeans try to thrash out a plan for dealing with the immigration crisis, here are some of the questions being debated:

**Does Europe need more immigrants?**

The influx of refugees from the Mediterranean and more recently from the Balkans — the region encompassing the former Yugoslavia — has fanned Europe’s fears that the additional immigration will overwhelm schools, strain government services, compete with local workers for jobs and drive down wages.

In England, Nigel Farage, leader of the anti-immigration United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), proposed that immigrants be barred from a free education until they have lived in Britain for five years because of overcrowding in British schools. 22

However, unlike Britain, which is undergoing something of a baby boom, much of Europe still suffers from low birth rates and an aging population. Europe as a whole has a fertility rate of 1.6 children per woman of childbearing age; the rate considered necessary to replace the existing population is 2.1. 23

That means many countries will have to import workers who can contribute to their Social Security systems to support the growing number of elderly people on pensions, some experts say. Migration “could be the tonic that an aging continent needs” over the next few decades, said Philippe LeGrain, a former economic adviser to the president of the European Commission, the EU’s politically independent executive arm, and a visiting senior fellow at the London School of Economics’ European Institute. 24

Immigration, he argues, is in Europe’s self-interest because the Continent needs people to do jobs “that Europeans no longer want to do,” such as picking fruit or caring for the aged — Europe’s fastest-growing industry.

Moreover, the common perception that migrants are “job stealers” is a “harmful fantasy,” said a recent report from the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants. A 14-year study into the effects of migration on 15 European countries showed that by performing manual labor, migrants from outside the EU pushed natives toward more highly skilled and better-paid jobs. 25

Kanayo Nwanze, president of the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), said in June that migrant workers are a “underappreciated” workforce that does not threaten European jobs. 26

A new report from IFAD shows that Europe’s 50 million migrant workers spend most of their earnings locally. At the same time, European countries are among those that benefit the most from agricultural workers’ remittances. For instance, portions of workers’ earnings sent home to Moldova, in Eastern Europe, account for 22 percent of its GDP. 27

European countries’ demographic needs vary widely: Germany has an aging population and needs immigrants for its labor force. 28 By contrast, immigration has kept Britain’s fertility rate close to the level needed to replace its population because foreign-born Britons tend to have more children than native-born Britons. On average, a woman born in Britain will have 1.8 children; among foreign-born women in Britain, the rate is 20 percent higher, or around 2.2 births per woman. 29

In countries with double-digit unemployment rates — France, Spain, Italy — it’s hard to make the case right now that workers need to be imported from outside, adding fuel to anti-immigration sentiment. “Germany is looking for new
foreign workers, [but] that is not at all the case in France,” says immigration historian Weil. “The [political] pressure you have on the French government when you have 10 percent unemployment doesn’t make it easy to make any decision to accept new immigrants.” By contrast, Germany has the lowest unemployment rate of any EU country—4.7 percent. 30

Many studies show that immigrants’ impact on wages is minimal, except for native workers in the bottom 15 to 20 percent of the income scale; their wages can be depressed by the presence of low-skilled immigrant laborers. 31

“We know there’s a major issue [at] the bottom of the labor market,” says Sir David Metcalf, chair of Britain’s Migration Advisory Committee, which advises Prime Minister Cameron on migration policy. At the bottom rungs of the ladder, wages for less-skilled British workers are undercut by low-skilled immigrants, who previously came from India and Africa and now come from EU countries in Eastern Europe such as Poland, he says. In addition, he says, unskilled migrant workers’ employers sometimes don’t comply with labor laws.

Oxford University economist Paul Collier, while agreeing with other economists that effects on wages have been marginal so far, shifts the argument from an economic to a cultural one, in his 2013 book, Exodus: Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century, contending that “social effects are usually likely to trump economic effects.” As evidence, he points to studies by Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam showing that the higher the concentration of immigrants in a community, the “less happy was the indigenous population.” 32

Collier’s book argues that immigration can threaten the trust and the “mutual regard” that makes citizens willing to transfer their tax support to one another through a free health system like Britain’s National Health Service or other European welfare programs. 33

Yet surveys show that distrust of foreigners and hostility to immigrants is greatest in communities with few immigrants; diverse cities like London tend to be more accepting, according to Eric Kaufmann, a professor of politics at Birkbeck College, University of London.

Londoners have benefited both culturally and economically from immigrants, says economist Jonathan Portes, director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research in London, and former chief economist for Labor Prime Minister Tony Blair, noting that London takes in over a third of Britain’s migrants. “There is a reason London is by far the most successful, most dynamic but also one of most innovative and economically powerful cities in Europe. That’s because we in London are by far the most open place to immigration from all parts of the world,” he says.

Although the political debate is usually framed in terms of whether a nation should accept more or fewer migrants, it’s also a question of whether the migrants bring the skills a society needs, notes economist Madeleine Sumption, director of the Migration Observatory, an independent research group at Oxford University. “Bringing in more people is less important than making sure that their skills are used properly, that people have an opportunity to get to jobs where they’re paying higher taxes and addressing fiscal problems,” she says, because immigrants in low-paid jobs won’t be contributing much to government revenues and Social Security systems.

For example, Germany, which accepts the most immigrants in the EU, works with employers to place migrants in apprenticeship programs that will bring them up to the skill level needed. 34 The government also makes sure that “salaries will reflect people’s qualifications and the actual job,” says Papademetriou of Migration Policy Institute Europe, to ensure that employers do not underpay migrant workers and thereby displace highly paid German workers.

Immigrants can “cushion the blow” from an aging population in a country like Germany, but they can’t entirely solve the problem, according to Reiner Klingholz, director of the Berlin Institute for Population and Development. After all, immigrants “get older too,” he said. 35

Dire predictions about Europe’s shrinking labor force likely overstate the number of workers the Continent will need, Papademetriou points out, because technology and automation will probably eliminate many jobs in the future. For example, he cites a 2010 study for the European Council that predicted Europe will need as many as 100 million immigrants by 2030 to augment its declining labor force. 36

“All this thinking in Europe is purely linear. It simply extrapolates on what we knew yesterday,” he says, without taking into count the “dramatic ongoing technology revolution.”

Are stronger border controls encouraging more smuggling of immigrants?

Most EU leaders say the union must make its external borders impenetrable to keep immigrants from coming to the Continent illegally. As Britain’s Cameron told Parliament in May, the EU needs to break “the link between setting off in a boat and achieving settlement in Europe.” 37

But anthropologist Andersson and other academic researchers disagree, and point to a paradox: When Europe tightens its external borders to discourage illegal immigration, more migrants try to come illegally.

Such a paradox has long been at work in Europe, they note. In preparation for joining the EU’s passport-free Schengen Agreement in 1991, Spain began to impose new visa requirements for Moroccans, Tunisians and other African nationals. Spain also began patrolling its coastal border more vigilantly. Previously, many people from these countries crossed into Spain freely, often as seasonal workers, before returning to their home countries. 38
illegal migration is a “direct” effect of borders and that the recent growth in ever entry of migrants to these places,“ cracks down, according to Andersson.

He says Spain’s 2005 announcement of stronger measures to stop migrants from entering its North African enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta “spurred the largest-ever entry of migrants to these places.”

And illegal migration often increases in anticipation of future government crackdowns, according to Andersson. He says Spain’s 2005 announcement of stronger measures to stop migrants from entering its North African enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta “spurred the largest-ever entry of migrants to these places.”

A new report from the U.N.’s rapporteur on the human rights of migrants concludes that it is “impossible” to seal borders and that the recent growth in illegal migration is a “direct” effect of increasingly restrictive immigration policies that make it difficult for anyone from outside the EU to obtain a visa. The report urges the EU to provide more legal options, such as temporary work visas, that allow multiple entries into Europe.

In recent years, the report says, the region has deemed migration from outside the EU “undesirable” and has dramatically reduced legal migration opportunities, especially for low-skilled workers in domestic work, construction, farming and tourism. “If you’re from a poor nation,” especially one in West Africa, Andersson says, “it’s become so difficult to enter the EU that you have little option other than to get a fake passport to travel by air” or find some other illegal route.

The creation of a common external border goes back to the 1980s when five EU countries — West Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg — decided they should abolish their internal borders to create a single market. They believed abolishing borders necessitated “compensatory measures,” including strengthened external border controls and cooperation on immigration and asylum. In 1985, the five countries signed the Schengen Agreement establishing common rules regarding visas, checks at external borders and the right to asylum. The agreement was reached outside of the EU treaty structure but was incorporated in 1999 into the EU’s body of common rights and obligations that is binding on all EU states, known as the “acquis.” Today, the borders dividing the 26 members of the Schengen area no longer require passports to cross, and typically booths once manned by border guards stand empty.

As Andersson relates in his book, Illegality, Inc., once countries like Spain joined the Schengen Agreement, they came under pressure from other EU countries to tighten visa restrictions on traditional migrants since they were now the area’s only guarded frontier.

Frontex, which is charged with coordinating the Schengen area’s external borders, was mainly concerned with replacing members’ patchwork arrangements with a uniform system of border control, according to Frontex spokesperson Moncure. “It wasn’t about strengthening borders but harmonizing requirements,” she says of the obligations placed on new border countries joining the Schengen district. For example, if a country like Poland historically had no visa requirement for Ukrainians, she says, “when they joined Schengen they needed to add a visa for Ukraine.”

The EU also encouraged border countries such as Spain to work out bilateral arrangements with transit countries like Libya and Morocco to prevent immigrants from leaving for Europe. Libyan leader Gadhafi famously warned that Europe would “turn black” unless the EU paid him 5 billion euros to block the arrival of illegal immigrants from Africa.

But Andersson found that the arrest and detention of mainly African migrants that followed these bilateral agreements just caused migrants to try
Illegal entry is exacerbated by the so-called Dublin rule, which came into effect in 1997 and was accepted by all EU states in 2003. It requires asylum-seekers to seek asylum in the first country of the EU where they arrive. (The original goal was to prevent “asylum shopping,” whereby an asylum-seeker rejected by one state makes multiple applications in other states.) That means many arriving in Italy and Spain must slip over the border illegally if they want to seek asylum in Germany, Sweden or the U.K.—strong economies where they’re more likely to find a job. 

Increasingly, some migration experts and refugee groups are urging the EU to allow refugees to apply for asylum from outside the Continent. In March, the European Commission for the first time floated the idea of setting up asylum processing centers in third countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon or Turkey, which often are migrant transit points. While France and Malta have supported the idea, 18 of the 28 EU member states with small immigrant communities are likely to oppose it, migration experts predict, because it could open the door to more migration. Transit countries like Egypt might also oppose the idea on the grounds that they would end up becoming destinations for migrants rejected by the processing centers. 

Ultimately, it comes down to having border controls credible enough to discourage illegal immigrants and their smugglers, other experts say. Papademetriou says it’s possible to control the borders if EU countries make a concerted effort to go after smugglers and return immigrants who are in Europe illegally. “It’s what you do after you rescue them that matters; that’s what the smugglers and their cargo are looking at,” he says.

Some humanitarian groups agree, at least partially. “To have a credible asylum system, you have to have a credible return system for those who don’t meet the criteria for international protection,” says Michael Diedring, secretary-general of the Brussels-based European Council on Refugees and Exiles, a coalition of 87 humanitarian groups.

Others say that efforts to help Mediterranean refugees stranded at sea have backfired by encouraging more people to make the dangerous crossing. Yet the number of illegal crossings and migrant deaths rose after Italy’s rescue operations were curtailed last year. Even before the April humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean, 954 people had already died this year, compared with only 96 by the end of April last year. As of July 29, more than 2,000 Mediterranean refugees have died in 2015, most from drowning. However, this probably understates the total number of people who have died trying to reach Europe this year as many other uncounted migrants perish crossing the Sahara Desert, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Should Europe use military tactics to prevent human smuggling?

EU foreign and defense ministers on May 18 back a plan to use their countries’ navies to intercept boats used to smuggle migrants across the Mediterranean and to destroy such boats before they leave Libyan waters.

On June 22, EU ministers announced they would begin the first phase of the military operations this summer—using surveillance in international waters that could help them intercept smugglers. 

However, Germany is insisting the EU get the U.N. Security Council’s approval before seizing and destroying suspected vessels in either international waters or the territorial waters of Libya or other North African countries. An EU proposal said systematic efforts are needed “to identify, seize and destroy vessels and assets before they are used by smugglers.”

Germany has said it will support armed action only if the EU has a U.N. mandate and Libya requests help. Because the EU does not have permission from either of the warring parties claiming to represent the Libyan government to enter its territorial waters, the surveillance operation cannot operate closer than 12 nautical miles off Libya.

Humanitarian groups concerned about civilian casualties oppose the military strategy. Often, fishing boats are sold to smugglers, making it hard to distinguish a boat’s purpose. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said destroying the boats in Libyan harbors pre-emptively would threaten Libyan fishermen. “If you destroy all these boats that could be used to transport migrants then you may end up affecting the general economic capacity of those people,” he said.

The German newspaper Der Spiegel said military intervention could simply lead smugglers to charge higher prices to cross the Mediterranean; other experts warn smugglers might arm themselves.
EU leaders are missing the point if they believe that once smugglers are arrested and boats are destroyed, people will no longer attempt to cross the Mediterranean,” said the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. “Unintended consequences could include a shift to more dangerous alternatives, such as inflatable boats or smaller vessels carrying greater numbers.”

Malakooti, author of the recent report on Mediterranean migration, says the smuggling rings have become so numerous and decentralized that “if you target one link within a ring, the rest will regroup and continue operating.”

However, Federica Mogherini, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, has stressed “it is not only a humanitarian emergency but also a security crisis, since smuggling networks are linked to, and in some cases finance, terrorist activities, which contributes to instability in a region that is already unstable enough.”

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said his nation is already “at war” with human trafficking, and he is urging the EU to help Italy fight it. Between October 2013 and October 2014, Italy’s navy intercepted smugglers’ boats in an operation dubbed Mare Nostrum (Latin for “Our Sea”), which rescued more than 150,000 migrants and apprehended 330 suspected smugglers. Italy ended the program last year when other EU members, led by Britain, refused to contribute financial support because they believed the operation was encouraging migrants to cross the Mediterranean.

A narrower operation run by Frontex replaced Mare Nostrum, with the border agency focusing on boats in distress only within 30 nautical miles of the Italian coast.

Some experts agree the EU should take stronger action. Col. Richard Kemp, former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, says the EU’s current strategy of rescuing migrants at sea is “completely wrong” because it just encourages more migration. “We should be taking military action on the shores of North Africa to stop them coming,” he says. As a model, he points to Australia’s successful naval operation to push back migrant boats from Indonesia, which the Australian government says has reduced the flow to a trickle.

EU officials have also pointed to the international community’s success in controlling piracy off the coast of Somalia, an operation known as Atalanta, which received the U.N. Security Council’s blessing. However, Peter Sutherland, the U.N. special envoy on migration and a former EU commissioner, said the comparison is not apt: “The calculus in the Mediterranean is far more complicated, with innocent refugees, including many children, in the line of fire between smugglers and any potential military operations.”

A new legal analysis of the military plan says the argument for a Security Council resolution lies on shaky legal and political ground. Unlike the anti-piracy campaign, it will be harder to prove that the current migration flow is “a threat to international peace and security in the region,” which is legal grounds for Security Council action, writes Sergo Mananashvili, a research associate at the European University Institute in Florence.

Moreover, he contends, evidence for another possible argument is weak: that migrant smuggling is linked to human trafficking, where people are taken somewhere involuntarily, because most migrants voluntarily travel in smugglers’ boats.

**BACKGROUND**

**Colonial Roots**

Modern immigration to Europe began in the late 19th century as a result of Europe’s colonial and trading activities, and colonialism helps explain where ethnic groups settled and whether they were accepted in their new countries.

Many of the originating countries were Muslim, now a source of much political anxiety with regard to migration into Europe. By the late 1800s, France, Britain and the Netherlands had gained control over most of the world’s Muslim territories: France conquered Algiers in

Continued on p. 660
1830-1858
Immigrants from Europe's colonies provide new source of labor for the Continent.

1830
France conquers Algeria, leading to arrival of Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians in France.

1858
India officially becomes a British colony as British crown takes control from East India Company.

1954-1980s
Europe encourages immigration to rebuild post-World War II economy until a recession hits in the 1970s.

1954
West Germany begins recruiting temporary foreign workers from Italy and Spain; in 1961, it signs an agreement with Turkey to import “guest workers” for two-year periods.

1973
West Germany discontinues guest-worker program.

1974
France and the Netherlands introduce “immigration stop” policies during 1970s recession, but immigration throughout European Union (EU) keeps rising because of family reunification and reluctance of guest workers to leave.

1977
France offers to pay immigrants to leave — with little success.

1985
Five member states of the European Economic Community sign a treaty allowing free movement among those nations by gradually abolishing border checks; 26 EU countries now belong to passport-free Schengen area.

1996-2000s
Terrorist attacks fuel European fears of migrants, especially those from Muslim countries.

1996
Radical Algerian group explodes bombs on Paris subways and trains. . . . Al Qaeda calls on Muslims to kill Americans and their allies.

2000
Germany makes it easier for Turkish guest workers and their children to become citizens.

Sept. 11, 2001
Al Qaeda flies hijacked jetliners into the World Trade Center and Pentagon, killing nearly 3,000.

2004
EU Free Movement directive extends the right of EU citizens to look for a job anywhere within the Union; 10 Eastern European nations, including Poland and Hungary, join the EU, and thousands of Eastern Europeans move to Western Europe to work.

2005
London transit bombings kill 52. . . . Hundreds of African migrants storm the fence dividing the Spanish enclave of Melilla from Morocco; at least six die.

2006
Spain closes its land border to Melilla; 550 migrants drown trying to reach the Spanish Canary Islands.

2010-Present
Arab Spring uprisings lead to turmoil throughout the Middle East and a surge of refugees in Europe.

2010
Anti-government protests and uprisings known as the Arab Spring begin in Tunisia. . . . Anti-immigration parties make unprecedented electoral gains in Europe. . . . Conservative David Cameron is elected British prime minister after promising to limit immigration; his government places caps on immigration from outside the EU.

2011
Syrian exodus begins as that nation’s civil war intensifies. . . . Libya becomes a hub for smuggling refugees after rebels overthrow Moammar Gadafi’s government and chaos follows.

2013
Drowning of 360 migrants trying to reach the island of Lampedusa, Italy, spurs Italian government to launch Mare Nostrum search-and-rescue operation.

2014
Italy ends Mare Nostrum after Britain says it encourages migrants to come to Europe. . . . Immigration skyrockets to record levels.

2015
In April, more than 700 refugees drown when a Mediterranean boat heading to Italy from Libya sinks. . . . In May, the EU proposes using member countries’ militaries to stop migrant smugglers; in June it launches the surveillance phase. . . . Hungary announces it will build a fence on its border with Serbia. . . . 2015 tally of migrants who died in the Mediterranean tops 2,000 by July 29.
For Syrian Refugee, Britain Is a Mixed Blessing

After perilous journey, asylum-seeker faces new obstacles.

To subdue his fear of the sea crossing, Ahmad Albkadla, a 22-year-old Syrian college student, doped himself up with sleeping pills for a weeklong trip across the Mediterranean in 2013 with 70 other refugees in a boat built for 17. Each time the drugs wore off, he awoke to the screams of other passengers, terrified that the craft would sink.

Albkadla had paid a smuggler in Alexandria, Egypt, $9,000 to get him to the Italian coast, aiming to join his two older brothers in England. He did not know that his odyssey would last almost a year, including long stays in detention, and cost him double that amount by the end, mostly to compensate other smugglers.

Albkadla described his harrowing journey in a coffee shop in London, where he has been awaiting action on his asylum application since August 2013. As an asylum-seeker, he is not permitted to work, so he is dependent on his oldest brother.

Since 2010, the rate at which Britain refuses visas to Syrians — for study, work or joining family — has doubled, according to statistics released by the U.K. government’s Home Office, and it now rejects 60 percent of Syrian visa requests. 1

This means that a Syrian refugee who wants to seek asylum in Britain often has no choice but to enter the country illegally, refugee groups say, since asylum-seekers must be physically present in the country to apply.

In March, the government said it was clamping down on Syrians with transit visas to other countries “to prevent the potential for a significant influx of citizens and nationals of Syria” and to stop “abuse” by Syrians trying to claim asylum in the U.K., “with the associated heavy burden on public resources.” 2

Despite the fact that Syrian asylum applications in the European Union (EU) last year surged by almost 150 percent to 123,000, only 2,222 Syrians applied to the U.K. 3 In part, this reflects migrants’ perceptions that Britain is less welcoming to asylum-seekers than elsewhere; Britain ranked fifth among EU countries in the number of asylum-seekers admitted in 2014 and 16th when adjusted for population. 4

Refugees in Britain often have to wait years to get action on their asylum applications. At the end of last year, almost 23,000 asylum applications received by the government since April 2006 were still awaiting a decision. The government attributed the delays to staff reductions resulting from an agency restructuring. 5

Albkadla says if he had known that settling in Britain would prove so difficult, he would have “prepared to die in Syria” rather than come to a country that fails to live up to its ideals.

As an activist opposed to Syrian President Bashar Assad, Albkadla believed that leaving Syria was his only option. In 2012 he had been arrested, jailed and tortured for participating in demonstrations against Assad in Daraa, Albkadla’s home province.

Daraa was the birthplace in 2011 of an uprising against the regime that became a civil war. Today, regime and rebel forces are still battling for the region, and Albkadla’s two sisters endure daily bombings, he says.

It took a $1,500 bribe for Albkadla’s family to get him released from jail. A summons to serve in the regime’s military, together with his fear of being re-arrested, prompted Albkadla to flee Syria.

Many Europeans also emigrated during this period to the United States. From 1845 to 1855, the British Isles “were witness to scenes as desperate as those now being enacted in the Mediterranean,” when more than 2 million migrants from impoverished Ireland left for North America in overpacked cargo ships, many dying along the way, writes chronicler Philip Hoare. 65

Europe did not become a major immigrant destination until the 1950s, when it needed workers to rebuild cities and economies ravaged by World War II. After the wartime deaths of hundreds of thousands of working-age men, the U.K. sought workers from the British Empire: Indians and Pakistanis came beginning in the 1950s, Bangladeshis in the 1970s. In the postwar economic boom, France, Germany and the Netherlands also recruited immigrants from their former colonies.

“Millions of North Africans, sub-Saharan Africans and Turks came to Europe between 1950 and 1975, and no one died and there was no smuggling,” observed Crépeau, the U.N. special rapporteur. It was easy for migrants to obtain a tourist visa and convert it to a work visa; they could return home and then come back. Unlike today, “mobility was the name of the game,” Crépeau said. 64

Indeed, most European governments saw immigrant labor as temporary. West Germany, Belgium and Sweden initiated “guest-worker” programs, recruiting workers first from

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1830, eventually also taking control of Morocco and Tunisia, also in North Africa, along with eight predominantly Muslim countries in West Africa. The British colonized Nigeria, with a large Muslim population in the North, and India, which included modern-day Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Dutch dominated trade in Southeast Asia, where today’s Indonesia — the world’s most populous Muslim nation — was once a Dutch colony. 62

By the end of the 19th century, France was importing low-paid workers from Algeria and other African territories, while other European countries recruited workers from their colonies and territories.
Albkadla wanted to settle in Egypt, but after failing to find a job there his oldest brother urged him to come to England. It was simple to find a smuggler in Alexandria to get him across the Mediterranean to Italy, but Italian border officials refused to let the boat land and sent it on to Greece.

Within a few days of arriving in Greece, Albkadla says he got caught up in a police roundup of Muslim men in connection with the rape of a Greek woman. Released after more than five months in jail, he made his way to Macedonia.

He entered the EU through Hungary, via Serbia. He continued through Austria and Italy to Calais, France, a popular jumping-off point for migrants attempting to cross the English Channel illegally to England.

After camping out in a forest for a month, Albkadla paid a smuggler $4,000 to hide him in the back of a vegetable truck; when the driver opened the rear doors of his truck upon reaching England, he was surprised to discover Albkadla and seven other migrants sitting on top of his vegetables. He called police. Albkadla spent another two months in detention before British authorities released him to his brother.

In contrast to Albkadla’s arduous journey, Mohammed Ateek, 27, a Syrian graduate student, came to England on a student visa and received asylum in 2013 within four months of applying. Ateek had organized anti-Assad demonstrations in London and written articles criticizing the regime.

Like Albkadla, Ateek laments Britain’s stance toward refugees, saying it is at odds with its history. Since January 2014, Britain has permitted entry to only 187 of the thousands of Syrians vetted by the United Nations as genuine refugees needing resettlement — “a pathetic number,” Ateek says. “It can host more.”

— Sarah Glazer

3 The latest figure released in March by the U.K. Home Office was 2,222. See “Immigration Statistics, October to December, 2014, op. cit., Section 8.11, “International Comparisons.”
5 Ibid.
6 Matt Dathan, “David Cameron says Britain will accept just ‘a few hundred’ more Syrian refugees despite 4 million displaced by the war,” The Independent, June 19, 2015, http://tinyurl.com/oofuy5u.

Immigration Limits

By the late 1960s and early ’70s, Europe’s industries were declining and the Continent’s need for overseas manpower was dwindling. Textile mills in England and linen mills in France would soon become obsolete, creating unemployment among migrants and a growing anti-immigrant sentiment.

On April 20, 1968, two weeks after the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. triggered riots in U.S. cities, Conservative British Parliament member Enoch Powell warned that the U.K.’s rising immigration would lead to similar racial tension. Citing the poet Virgil, he said, “I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood.”

When the 1973-77 global recession hit, many immigrants remained in their adopted countries even if they were unemployed, spurring European fears that immigrants would compete for jobs with natives and burden welfare programs. Between 1973 and 1975, many European governments instituted “immigration stop” policies to discourage labor migration.

Paradoxically, more immigrants came to Europe during the decades after the “stop” policies were instituted than in the preceding decades, largely because families or spouses joined the original immigrants, who had often migrated alone. By 2003, the number of North Africans arriving in France was triple the number before the government began restricting immigration.

Since then, EU governments have tried repeatedly to discourage immigration. Some, like France, have even offered monetary incentives and con-
Terrorism Threat Worries Europeans

Some say militants are arriving disguised as migrants.

As thousands of migrants cross the Mediterranean by boat, some European politicians worry that among them may be fighters from the Islamic State and other militant groups.

That concern came to the fore in May, when Italian police arrested Abdelmajid Touil, a Moroccan living in Italy accused of supplying arms used in the March 18 killing of 21 people at a museum in Tunisia. The Islamic State (also known as ISIS and ISIL) claimed responsibility for the massacre. According to authorities, Touil had entered Italy on a migrant boat in February.

Touil was fingerprinted upon his arrival in Italy and was ordered expelled, but he disappeared and authorities lost track of him. Neither Italy's government nor its police had considered him a terrorism risk, according to Interior Minister Angelino Alfano. But Alfano defended his actions. "I never ruled out the fact that Italy could be under risk of terrorism," he told members of parliament. "I've always said that the alert is very high, including the use of boats to smuggle terrorists, even if we have no evidence of this." 1

Italy's anti-immigration party, the Northern League, said Italy should not wait for hard evidence to act. "What must happen for something to be done about this?" asked Matteo Salvini, the Northern League's leader. "A terrorist attack? Alfano should quit." 2

Experts, however, remain divided about the chances of terrorists coming to Europe disguised as migrants.

"I believe the Islamic State [has] already planned to send further terrorists from Libya across the Mediterranean into Europe," says Richard Kemp, former commander of British forces in Afghanistan and head of the prime minister's counterterrorism team from 2002-06. This is one of their main pipelines "to get people into position there who are unable to [make it to Europe] by legal means." Although Kemp says he does not know of other cases besides Touil's, he adds, "It is a route that was widely used by al Qaeda in the past and to some extent still is. It is certainly a serious threat." 3

But Sajjan Gohel, international security director for the Asia-Pacific Foundation, a London think tank on global security, is skeptical. "If terrorists wanted to carry out an attack in Europe, there are already a large number of willing recruits" inside Europe who share a radical ideology, he says. Moreover, he points out, the Islamic State can easily afford to send a terrorist by plane, as it reportedly did in a June 26 attack on a mosque in Kuwait. 4

The terrorism issue overshadowed the European Union's (EU) migration summit held June 26. The same day 38 vacationers, 30 of them Britons, were killed in an attack at the Tunisian beach resort of Sousse. 5 One of the men involved had trained at the same Libyan jihadi camp as the two museum attackers, authorities said. 6

In response, the British government announced it was readying a "full spectrum" strategy that would help schools, universities and prisons counter radical groups' efforts to enlist students and others. More than 700 Britons who are potential terrorism recruits have traveled to Syria, and hundreds have returned home, where they pose a significant threat, according to police. 7

Prime Minister David Cameron on July 20 announced legislation to give parents the power to cancel their children's passports if they fear they are traveling to Syria or Iraq to join a terrorist group. 8 It was one of a range of measures Cameron announced that day to prevent young people from being radicalized by extremist Islamist ideology.

At the June 26 summit, European Council President Donald Tusk said EU heads of state will present a new security strategy to combat global terrorism, but that plan is not expected until June 2016. 9 The EU's military surveillance of migrant smugglers' boats in the Mediterranean, launched June 22, could supply information about terrorist connections, some experts say.

With most countries facing budget cuts in border police and military and intelligence operations, Kemp says it's difficult to screen the large numbers of refugees coming into Europe illegally. 10

Will Geddes, founder of a counterterrorism protection company, International Corporate Protection in London, says although he doesn't have direct evidence of terrorists arriving in Europe aboard migrant boats, "there's a very high likelihood [they are], according to my sources." 11

North African criminal rings that once specialized in contraband weapons have branched out to human smuggling because it's so profitable, he says, and "inevitably those groups have collaborated with groups like the Islamic State." 12


3 Ibid.

4 Imogen Calderwood, "Bomber behind terror attack that killed 27 is identified as Saudi citizen who flew to Kuwait just hours before the attack," Daily Mail, July 8, 2015, http://tinyurl.com/ngk7psa.


7 Vikram D odd, "B om ber behind terror attack that killed 27 is identified as Saudi citizen who flew to Kuwait just hours before the attack," Daily Mail, July 8, 2015, http://tinyurl.com/ngk7psa.


continued welfare support to immigrants if they returned home. Most of the programs ended in failure. 68

Terrorist Attacks

Acts of terrorism in the 1990s and early 2000s fueled fears that radical Islamists could be entering Europe from Muslim countries. Between 1995 and 1996, Algerians linked to militant groups exploded bombs on Paris subways and trains. The Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by al Qaeda on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon also changed how Europeans perceived their Muslim neighbors: A group of Muslims who attended a mosque in Hamburg, Germany, had planned the attacks against the United States.

In 2004 terrorists linked to al Qaeda attacked Madrid’s commuter trains, and a radical Islamist murdered Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, an outspoken critic of Islam. The following year, on July 7, four suicide bombers struck London’s transit system, killing 52; all four terrorists were young Britons with links to hardline Islamist groups.

In 2004, the EU admitted 10 new countries — the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta. Under EU rules, citizens of those countries were free to move to any member nation to work, and thousands of Eastern Europeans poured into Western Europe.

While the EU was opening its eastern border, Africans continued to risk their lives to enter Europe from the south. Once Spain joined the Schengen Agreement, its North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla became an EU land border on the Africa continent. With that new border came new Europe-bound migrants who were “bedraggled, poor [and] black” — “quite unlike” earlier migrants from Morocco, India and Spain, anthropologist Andersson wrote. 69

In the autumn of 2005, hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants rushed over the 10-foot-high razor-wire fences separating Melilla from Morocco; at least six died. The following year, after authorities managed to close off that entry point to Spain, record numbers of migrants headed to Spain’s Canary Islands by boat. By September 2006, 550 people had drowned while undertaking the risky 600-mile voyage. 70

In 2010 anti-immigration parties made unprecedented electoral gains in Europe. In Sweden, the nationalist Democrats won enough votes to gain representation in the parliament for the first time. In the Netherlands, the coalition government agreed to demands from the anti-immigration Freedom Party to make it harder for immigrants’ spouses to join them.

In Britain, Cameron was elected prime minister after promising to cut immigration from hundreds of thousands to “tens of thousands,” and his government capped immigration from outside the EU. 71

The Arab Spring movement, sparked by Tunisian protests in 2010, had enormous implications for Europe, prompting record numbers of refugees to leave their homes in the Middle East. 72 Libya’s uprising against the Gadafi regime began in 2011 after government forces opened fire on protesters. In March of that year, NATO authorized strikes on government targets; Gadafi fled and was killed by rebels in August 2011. And in Syria, peaceful protests against the regime of President Assad in 2011 escalated into a civil war after a brutal government crackdown.

In October 2013, the drowning of more than 360 migrants, mostly Eritreans and Somalis, who were trying to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa from Libya spurred the Italian government to launch the Mare Nostrum search-and-rescue effort. 73 Italy ended that effort in 2014, when Britain and other EU countries refused to contribute. However, illegal immigration continued at record levels.

EU Response

It remains unclear whether the EU, as part of a military strategy against illegal migration, will search, seize and destroy smugglers’ boats, particularly in their ports of departure.

The European Council said it “will assess when to move beyond this first step” — which is surveillance of smugglers’ boats — taking into account the need for a U.N. mandate and the consent of the coastal states. 74 Many political observers doubt that the U.N. or coastal states such as Libya will approve such a military operation.

At a follow-up EU summit on June 26, where national leaders argued into the early hours of the morning, members could agree only on weak measures to solve the migrant crisis. Italy and Greece wanted to relocate 40,000 Syrian and Eritrean asylum-seekers to other EU countries, but national leaders squabbled over where they should be sent, and the idea of mandatory quotas was abandoned. 75

Instead, the EU hopes to get member countries to voluntarily agree over the next two years to take those refugees. 76 As of July 20, the EU said it had received pledges from member countries to take 32,256 of the 40,000 in Italy and Greece. 77

European Council President Donald Tusk of Poland expressed his frustration with this approach. “I can understand those who want this voluntary mechanism, but they will only be credible if they give precise and significant pledges by the end of July at the latest, because solidarity without sacrifice is pure hypocrisy,” he said. 78

Under the agreement, another 20,000 people identified by the U.N. as refugees
living outside their home countries would be resettled in EU countries.

“If you look at the numbers that need assistance, [the 60,000-refugee target is] shoveling sand against the sea with a teaspoon,” Diedring of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles says.

The summit had less difficulty deciding on tough measures to evict migrants crossing illegally into the EU who don’t qualify for protection as refugees. In a plan to be set out this month, the EU will strengthen Frontex to help frontline countries such as Italy and Greece return those migrants to their home countries. The agreement also promised to create “hotspots” — reception facilities in frontline EU states where determinations can be made quickly as to who qualifies for international protection. 79

At the summit — overshadowed the same day by terrorist attacks in Tunisia, Kuwait and France — Tusk said EU heads of state would present a new security strategy to combat global terrorism, but that plan is not expected until June 2016. 80

Disintegrating Consensus

Several EU countries have tried to stop illegal migration on their own by tightening borders — even if the refugees are within the 26-country, passport-free Schengen area — posing another political challenge for the EU.

Hungary, which has become a frontline country of entry for migrants taking the land route through Serbia and whose government is known for anti-immigration rhetoric, announced in June it was building a 13-foot-high, 110-mile fence along its border with Serbia. 81

The same month, Hungary briefly suspended the Dublin regulation, the EU rule requiring that refugees seeking asylum have their claims processed in the first EU country where they arrive and that they be returned to that first-arrival country. Hungarian government officials said “the boat is full,” with more than 60,000 migrants having entered Hungary so far this year, and that the country had “exhausted the resources at its disposal.” 82

In Italy, Prime Minister Renzi is calling for a change to the Dublin regulation. 83 Italy and Greece have been criticized for not fingerprinting and processing all arriving asylum-seekers, instead letting them slip over the border to other EU countries. The U.N. estimates that half of all refugees who pass through Greece and Balkan countries on their way to Hungary and Northern Europe do so without being registered by authorities. 84

France and Austria have instituted checks at their borders for migrants from Italy: France at the Italian coastal town of Ventimiglia, and Austria near the Italian town of Bolzano. 85

As thousands of migrants were trying to make their way illegally to Britain from the French ferry port of Calais in June, Prime Minister Cameron pledged to build a fence at the port. 86 Britain, which does not participate in the borderless Schengen area, has already negotiated an “opt-out” of any refugee resettlement scheme and has indicated it won’t participate in any new EU refugee relocation program.

This month, Britain was assembling the 2.5-mile fence to protect trucks entering the Eurotunnel terminal from migrants hitchhiking clandestinely — part of a $16.6 million security package by the British government to try to stop migrant smuggling from Calais. 87

The Calais crisis reached a new pitch July 29 as hundreds of migrants stormed the Eurotunnel train terminal in Calais for the second night in an attempt to board trains traveling under the English Channel to England. Some sources speculated migrants had shifted tactics to a mass attempt to use the tunnel because security had been strengthened at the entrance to the Calais-Dover ferry in June, where many migrants tried to get into trucks secretly or hang onto the underside for the channel crossing. British officials pledged an additional 7 million pounds ($11 million) for fencing and said they would cooperate with France to return migrants to their home countries, especially to West Africa. UKIP leader Farage called for the British army to be deployed to strengthen border controls on the British side of the channel. 88

A Sudanese man died at the train tunnel when he was hit by a truck. More than 140 migrants were believed to have reached the U.K. after the two-day effort; police turned most migrants back and bused them to the makeshift camps where they have been staying in Calais. 89

Anti-Immigrant Backlash

Nationalist parties in Europe have gained support as the flow of immigrants has increased in some traditionally homogeneous countries such as Denmark and Finland.

In addition, the recent string of terrorist attacks, mostly by Muslim extremists, has boosted support for the nationalists. Italian police arrested Abdelmajid Touil, a Moroccan whom authorities said supplied arms for an attack on a museum in Tunisia in March that killed 21. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the assault. According to authorities, Touil had entered Italy on a migrant boat in February. 90

In June, the anti-immigration Danish People’s Party became the nation’s second strongest party. Still fresh was the memory of a Feb. 14 rampage by the son of Palestinian immigrants at a free-speech event outside a synagogue that killed two and wounded five.

In neighboring Finland, the far-right, anti-immigration Finns Party joined the multiparty coalition governing Finland for the first time. 91

In France, the Netherlands and Austria, anti-immigrant parties have led recent national polls. In the wake of the lethal January attack on staffers at Charlie
economists are not very good at seeing complete human beings. They tend to view the world as a giant value-maximizing machine: Allegiances and obligations, a settled sense of place, national social contracts and other such things feature in their story mainly as frictions.

If Britain was just a labor market, it would make perfect sense to fill as many jobs as possible with the most talented people from around the world and to keep the people doing more routine work on their toes by bringing in people from poorer countries with stronger work ethics and lower wage expectations.

But Britain is NOT just a market; it is a society of millions of micro-communities and networks of people held together by complex ties of obligation and mutual dependence. When the immigration door is half-opened, as it was in 1997, many of those relationships are disrupted. (And an unprecedented number of people came after 1997. England’s ethnic minority population trebled, from around 7 percent in the mid-1990s to more than 22 percent now.)

If Britain had become a much richer country and growth benefited all classes, then objections to immigration would have been left to a small xenophobic minority. But even economists who favor large-scale immigration admit that the net impact of migration on growth, wages and employment has been negligible for the existing population. Moreover, everyone agrees that to the extent there has been an effect, it has been regressive: somewhat beneficial for employers (bingo! we no longer have to train anyone) and somewhat disadvantageous for citizens facing downward pressure on wages and more competition for jobs and public services.

Nobody sensible on my side of the argument wants to stop immigration, but we do want to return it to the more moderate levels of the recent past. The current levels cause brain drain from poor countries that desperately need energetic people while producing little economic benefit to rich countries and considerable social disruption and ethnic segregation. It is a lose-lose situation. Above all, it is the settled will of about 80 percent of the U.K. population, including 62 percent of ethnic minority Britons born here, that immigration be reduced.

Britons are not against individual immigrants, most of whom work hard and contribute to society. But people of all classes, ethnicities and regions do not see how large-scale immigration benefits them or their country, and they rightly want it reduced.

Our years after the British government set a target of reducing net migration to the “tens of thousands,” the target is widely regarded as Prime Minister David Cameron’s biggest broken promise, with net migration currently running at a near-record 300,000 per year. But the attempt to reduce immigration to the government’s target drives a bizarre set of policies designed to reduce skilled migration from outside the European Union (EU) and, even more crazily, to reduce the numbers of foreign students at U.K. universities.

Indeed, just a few weeks ago, applications exceeded the government’s quota for skilled-worker visas. The BBC reported that “as well as nurses, doctors and teachers other visas refused were applications to bring in accountants, solicitors and management consultants.” The economic benefits — short or long term — to the U.K. of leaving these posts unfilled are difficult to see.

On the contrary, these restrictions, and even more so further ones proposed by Cameron, will reduce growth and make us poorer. There is an increasing body of evidence that suggests migration, especially skilled migration, does more than help fill short-term gaps in the labor market — it also enhances productivity over the longer term.

Of course, public concern in the U.K. about immigration is not primarily about skilled workers or foreign students but about low-skilled migration from within the EU. Here the trade-offs are harder and bound up with wider debates about the U.K.’s role in the EU. But there is still no evidence EU immigrants take jobs from natives overall, and any downward impact on wages appears to be small. Young, unskilled workers are having a hard time in the U.K., as in much of the rest of Europe. But immigration is not the main or even a major cause of this problem, and hence reducing immigration can’t and won’t be the solution.

It’s worth noting that anti-immigration sentiment is higher in areas where economic prospects are poorer and, not coincidentally, there are fewer immigrants; by contrast London, still the most popular destination for immigrants by far, is much more at ease with high migration. Reducing immigration won’t help those areas that feel “left behind,” but it will damage more successful regions and sectors of the economy.

Sadly, too many British politicians share the view that reducing immigration would both reduce social tensions and do little economic damage. The evidence suggests the reverse is true.
One measure of UKIP’s ability to pressure the mainstream parties is Cameron’s pledge to hold a referendum before the end of 2017 on whether Britain should leave the EU. UKIP, which supports such a move, has objected to the EU requirement that Britain accept unlimited numbers of migrants from Eastern European member countries. Before that referendum Cameron has said he wants to renegotiate the terms of the U.K.’s agreement with Brussels, away from “ever-closer union,” a proposal that the European Council plans to take up in December.

For instance, Cameron wants to require immigrants from the EU to wait four years before they can claim welfare benefits, a move strongly opposed by Eastern European countries. Poland, which sends thousands of immigrants to work in Britain, says the requirement would violate the EU principles barring discrimination against workers from other EU countries. This and other changes could require amendments to EU treaties.

**OUTLOOK**

**Moral Dilemma**

While the Mediterranean crisis is continuing, roughly as many refugees are now entering Europe along the land route through the Balkans to Hungary as through the popular sea route from Libya to Italy, according to figures for the first half of the year from Frontex. One reason may be that as Middle Eastern countries tighten their visa rules, it becomes harder for refugees to pass through that region on their way to Libya and then Europe, according to a Frontex spokesperson.

More than 1 million Syrian refugees are in Lebanon, where they make up 25 percent of the population, and 1.8 million are in Turkey, now the world’s leading host of Syrian refugees.

In many ways, humanitarian organizations like the U.N. refugee agency and leaders of EU countries continue to talk past one another: While humanitarians emphasize the plight of refugees and Europe’s moral obligation to take in more of them, national leaders say they are trying to stem a seemingly never-ending invasion of people threatening to overburden their way of life.

The result may be that even more countries will lose patience with Brussels, predicts Papademetriou of the Migration Policy Institute Europe. Currently, Germany and Sweden take nearly half of all asylum-seekers in Europe, but even Germany is running out of housing for refugees in its cities and facing popular resentment against them.

“If Germany is one of only two countries that is open to refugees, I do not believe that Germany will be open two years from now,” Papademetriou says. “Unless Europe can minimize the “centrifugal forces” of migration, he says, more countries will say, ‘We’ll go our own way,’ whether it is Britain pulling out of the EU or Hungary refusing to follow the Dublin regulations.

While analysts like Weil of the University of Paris favor a more international approach that would involve the United States and other major nations, others are skeptical that Western leaders will attack the root causes of migration: people fleeing unstable countries due to war, persecution or poverty.

“It’s almost like Nation-Building 101 has gone out the window since 9/11,” says Sajjan Gohel, international security director for the Asia-Pacific Foundation, a London-based think tank that provides analysis on global security issues.

Countries like the United States and its European allies seem to have forgotten the importance of rebuilding nations’ postwar governments and economic structures — the way they did in Europe and Japan after World War II, says Gohel, who teaches international history at the London School of Economics. He points to the lack of stable governments in countries such as Libya, where NATO bombing helped overthrow Gadafi.
“Eliminating despots is important,” he says. “But hand in hand there has to be a process to help the country stand up for itself.”

For U.N. human rights official Crépeau, the choice remains a moral one — for both refugees and European countries that host them.

“The moral imperative is to save lives, so that’s the first thing to do,” Crépeau said in an interview in April. “If we continue what we’ve done — especially in Europe — it’s not going to get better.”

European countries need to do the right thing — the moral thing, he said, by treating the refugees compassionately. “Would we find acceptable that our sons and daughters be treated the same way if they were in the same circumstances?” he asked. “If we answer no, then we have the answer to our moral dilemma.”

Debate in Europe is likely to continue over whether immigrants take jobs from natives, and, ultimately, whether they harm a nation’s social fabric. Indeed, some analysts say the cultural question may be as important as economic and political ones.

The lack of a common “emotional citizenship,” argues British writer David Goodhart, could ultimately threaten the kinds of generous welfare states European citizens are willing to support with high taxes. It’s possible to imagine Britain becoming “a less civil, ever more unequal and ethnically divided country — as harsh and violent as the United States,” he writes in his book The British Dream.

Saira Grant, legal and policy director of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, a British nonprofit advocating just immigration policies, says, “Xenophobia arises when people feel that because of someone else they’re suffering.” Britons express “legitimate concern” when they say it’s getting harder to get a doctor’s appointment with the National Health Service, Grant says, and harder to get their children into the school of their choice because of larger numbers of immigrants.

But the solution, she says, is for the government to invest more in such services, not to blame the arrival of immigrants. As for the acceptance of people from foreign cultures, she says “cultural change is something that takes time” for the host country, something that has already happened to some extent in Britain, she says. As one example Grant cited Britain’s favorite national dish for the past decade, chicken tikka masala, an Indian curry recipe.

Paradoxically, opposition to immigration tends to be highest in communities with few migrants, probably because those residents have not had much contact with foreigners, according to Kaufmann of Birbeck College. Opposition to immigration, Kaufmann says, is “not about jobs, houses and schools; it’s more about this sense of the country not being familiar, cultural alienation and dissonance.”

Rising hostility to migrants in places like Hungary worries immigrant communities and those from different cultural backgrounds. In a recent questionnaire sent out by Hungary’s government, 80 percent of the public favored a tougher approach on immigration and 60 percent said immigration and terrorism were linked. Right-wing groups have already demonstrated against immigration in Budapest and are planning more demonstrations outside of refugee camps and along the Serbian border, The New York Times reported this month.

“Until now there has been little Islamophobia in Hungary,” said Zoltan Bolek, president of the Hungarian Islamic Community, one of two associations representing 10,000 Muslims in a country of 10 million. “So we are surprised at what is happening.”

Notes

15 Ibid.


C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, “In Strikes with a B. A. in American History. Reports include “Free Speech on Campus” and “Prisoners and Social-Policy Issues also have appeared in CQ Researcher regularly to Sarah Glazer. Her articles on health, education and social-policy issues also have appeared in The New York Times and The Washington Post. Her recent CQ Researcher reports include “Free Speech on Campus” and “Prisoners and Mental Illness. She graduated from the University of Chicago with a B.A. in American history.

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Selected Sources

Books


Through interviews with Africans attempting to migrate to Spain and the border guards who try to stop them, a London School of Economics anthropologist presents a vivid argument for the futility of border controls.


An Oxford University economist, while granting the economic benefits of migration, warns that opening the door to migrants in densely populated Europe will lead to "prolonged social problems" and could undermine mutual trust.


A journalist reports on clandestine migration in Europe and the growing reluctance of the European Union (EU) to take in migrants from other parts of the world.

Articles


Europe’s asylum system will be very hard to change, says this political analysis of EU proposals to deal with today’s refugees and economic migrants.


The U.N. says refugees are overwhelming Greece and Balkan countries and urges the rest of Europe to take in more of them.


Australia turned back migrants’ boats but its get-tough policy may simply be diverting refugees to other places, including Europe, experts say.


A legal researcher at the European University Institute in Florence, which studies EU issues, lays out the legal and political obstacles to the EU’s military strategy for stopping migrant smugglers.

Reports and Studies


Arguing that sealing Europe’s borders is impossible and only empowers smugglers, Crépeau, the U.N. special rapporteur on migrants’ rights, urges the European Union to open more legal routes to migration.


Human rights abuses are driving risky sea migration, and EU efforts to prevent the crossings are “likely to fail,” says the rights group.


This report, based on interviews with 187 migrants, finds the "push" factors of war and instability have been more important than Europe’s rescue mission at sea as the impetus for the recent surge of migrants across the Mediterranean.


Majorities in Greece, Italy, France and Britain want stricter immigration limits, polls by this nonpartisan think tank find.


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Demographic researchers from Oxford University dispute predictions that an aging Europe will need much more immigration, saying delayed pension ages and ongoing immigration already are solving the problem of a declining labor force.


This widely cited study found migration does not drive down wages except at the lowest end of the wage scale.
Border Control


Hungary is constructing a 109-mile wall along the Serbian border to stop the flow of illegal immigrants from neighboring countries.


European Union (EU) leaders recommended stronger security measures, including more border checks for travelers, in the wake of the January terrorist attack at the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.

European Union Migration


Majorities of British, French, Italian and German citizens oppose the Schengen Agreement that allows free movement between EU countries.


German members of the European Union Parliament strongly oppose British Prime Minister David Cameron’s proposal to restrict workers’ movements within the EU.

Political Turmoil and War


While Turkey attempts to integrate Syrian refugees by adopting more inclusive policies, many migrants still struggle to find work or register for aid upon arrival.


Five thousand Eritreans flee their nation each month to escape corrupt government and systemic human rights violations, including mass surveillance and military rule.


An Islamist group challenging Libya’s government suspended peace talks until the end of the Ramadan and Eid holidays.

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