



# Redefining EU Refugee Policy in 2021

## Intro

In the six years since the height of the Mediterranean refugee crisis, a lot of time has been lost to develop a fast, fair, and functional EU asylum system. Refugees and migrants are still leaving their home countries for a dangerous and often deadly journey to Europe. The EU asylum system is yet to be reformed to account for the increasing pressures in the years and decades ahead.

## Context

At least 17,900 migrants have died in the Mediterranean Sea since 2015 according to the Missing Migrants Project. The number of deaths has decreased in recent years but remains high at roughly 1,400 in 2020 due to unfit and overloaded boats, lack of life vests, and limited emergency assistance from European border patrol. Some refugees are intercepted by Libyan coastguards and brought to detention centres facing torture and rape.

Meanwhile, inhumane conditions persist in refugee camps in Europe, particularly in Greece and Bosnia, where camps have not been prepared for winter.

Migration across the Mediterranean Sea has received the bulk of attention by the European public, yet migrant deaths are even higher in preceding parts of their route. The UN reports that twice as many migrants die when crossing the Saharan desert than in the Mediterranean Sea.

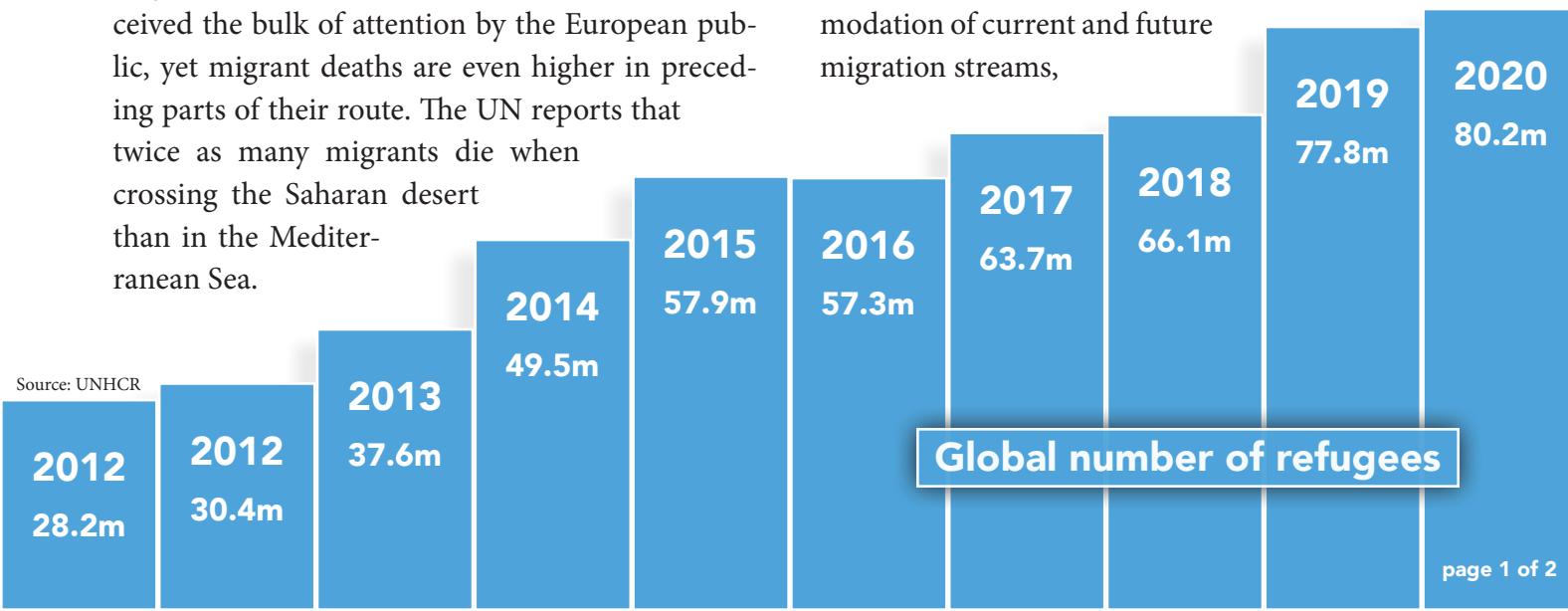
## Problem analysis

While the number of refugees arriving in Europe has decreased since 2015, the total number of refugees has steadily increased to a record 80 million in 2020. Humanitarian crises caused by the worsening climate crisis will likely displace more in the coming years and decades.

The current EU asylum system is unable to cope with the current—let alone future—waves of refugees arriving on its shore. Asylum applications are only possible on EU territory, incentivising refugees to take the dangerous sea route from Libya to Italy, Turkey to Greece, or Morocco to Spain. Furthermore, the EU Dublin Regulation states that refugees can only apply for asylum in the first EU country they set foot on which leaves disproportionate weight on the shoulders of Mediterranean countries, Greece, Italy and Spain. These countries' respective application processes are overloaded and inefficient. Relocation of refugees among European countries is slow with some countries refusing to take in refugees altogether.

## Policy proposals

To enable a fair, safe, and efficient accommodation of current and future migration streams,



the EU must reform its asylum policies:

### 1) Improving the conditions in refugee camps

is a necessary first step to enable a humane process and protect vulnerable migrants from weather, illnesses, and violence. This includes the relocation of refugees from Greek islands to the mainland. The European Union must set and enforce safe accommodation standards.

**2) Protect refugees' rights** by holding accountable member states that perform illegal pushbacks of migrants at their borders.

**3) Disincentivising the crossing** of the Mediterranean Sea involves allowing refugees to apply for asylum in non-EU countries, ideally in their home country and, if impossible, in a country of transit. In places such as Turkey, this infrastructure is already in place, however, the EU only admitted too little refugees to provide a viable alternative path to Europe. For other countries of origin, the European Union must find individual agreements similar to Turkey's to ensure that migrants can be quickly returned in exchange for others who have been granted asylum through the application process.

**4) Faster asylum application processing** in EU countries would further discourage the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea as migrants deemed "not in need for protection" are returned quickly. As more migrants are returned to their home country or last country of transit and others are resettled to the EU through an orderly process in non-EU countries, refugees will be discouraged from taking on the deadly risk of crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

**5) Facilitate visa application** for economic migrants from countries that wouldn't qualify for asylum protection. Allowing them a legal and safe pathway to Europe would lead to fewer deportations or undocumented migrants without prospects to find work.

**6) EU countries must share the responsibility** of admitting, supporting and integrating refugees. If countries refuse to allow refugees, they must take over other responsibilities such as organising the deportation of refugees that have not been granted asylum.

If implemented, we predict that these policies will decrease human suffering and costs for the EU.

