



**WORLD PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION**

Advance Psychiatry and Mental Health Across the World

## **World Psychiatric Association:**

[www.wpanet.org](http://www.wpanet.org)

### **Position Statement: Europe Migrant & Refugee Crisis.**

a partnership with the Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation- International Foundation  
(careif) [www.careif.org](http://www.careif.org)

## **Migrant, Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Needs in Europe**

Europe is struggling to cope with the large-scale influx of migrants making their way across the Mediterranean to Europe in 2015, the biggest since the aftermath of World War II, - sparking a crisis, as countries struggle to cope with the influx, and creating division in the European Union (EU) over how best to deal with resettling people.

According to the UNHCR, more than 380,000 migrants and refugees have landed on Europe's southern shores in 2015, up from 216,000 arrivals in the whole of 2014. They are fleeing persecution, poverty and conflicts that rage beyond the continent's borders. The number of deaths in the process can only be guessed at.

A disproportionate burden continues to be faced by some countries, particularly in Greece and Italy. Germany has recently been more liberal in accepting migrants; promising to accept about 1 million people over the next 12 months; other countries have begun to take a more humanitarian line albeit slow and narrow in practicality.

Even when physical needs and physical health needs of migrants and asylum seekers are looked after, their mental health needs are ignored.

*World Psychiatric Association along with Careif and the Centre for Psychiatry -a WPA Collaborating Centre - in Queen Mary, University of London, calls for action.*

## Position Statement: Migrant & Refugee Crisis

The World Psychiatric Association (WPA) aims to increase knowledge and skills about mental disorders and how they can be treated and prevented and promotion of mental health. By encouraging highest possible standards of clinical practice, WPA aims to promote highest ethical standards in psychiatric practice and to disseminate knowledge about evidence based practice. WPA aims to be a voice for the dignity and human rights of the patients and their families and to facilitate communication and assistance to societies. The mission of the WPA is to promote the advancement of psychiatry and mental health for all people of the world.

### **Background:**

Refugee and asylum seeker matters are of global importance. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) <sup>1</sup> estimates the number people forcibly displaced worldwide in 2014, to be, 59.5 million. It has been suggested that any given time nearly 300 million people around the world are migrants. These figures are made up of Economic migrants, Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced People (IDP) and Stateless People. War, conflict and political turbulence in many regions of the world have increased the number of displaced people fleeing complex emergencies and disasters. They often end up in large camps in low and middle income countries hosting over 86% of the world's refugees, compared to some 70% ten years ago.

The countries currently hosting the vast majority of refugees from Syria are reaching breaking point and even experiencing food shortages, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, sheltering 3.6 million Syrian refugees between them, are overwhelmed and international humanitarian funding are falling far short of the need and indeed, were promised. Many would

rather attempt the dangerous journey to Europe than exist in impoverished, overcrowded refugee camps for many years, where they can experience even more violence, rape and death. In the recent few months Germany has taken nearly a million refugees.

There were 19.5 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2014, 14.4 million under the mandate of UNHCR, around 2.9 million more than in 2013. The other 5.1 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

In 2014, the country hosting the largest number of refugees was Turkey, with 1.59 million refugees- now it is expected to be nearly 2 million. By the end of 2015, Syria had become the world's top source country of refugees, overtaking Afghanistan, which had held this position for more than three decades. Today, on average, almost one out of every four refugees is Syrian, with 95 per cent located in surrounding countries. In 2015, 51% of refugees were children, the highest figure for child refugees in more than 10 years.

About 38.2 million people were forcibly uprooted and displaced within their own country and are known as Internally Displaced People (IDP). Continued fighting in the Syrian, brought the number of IDP in that country to 7.6 million. Iraq witnessed massive new internal displacement as a result of the Islamic State (or 'ISIS') offensive across multiple parts of the country. Renewed fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo displaced 1 million people, bringing the total number of IDP in that country to 2.8 million. The conflict in South Sudan, which erupted in December 2013, displaced more than 1.5 million individuals within the country. In addition conflict in The Central African Republic (611,000), South Sudan (200,000), and Yemen (85,000) has further added to refugee crisis.

*Statelessness* refers to the condition of an individual who is not considered a national by any state. Syria have more than 300,000 denationalized Kurds, Kuwait have 93,000 Bidoon (*bidoon jinsiya*), Dominican Republic have an estimated 900,000 to 1.2 million undocumented individuals of Haitian origin, many of who are stateless or at risk of statelessness<sup>2</sup>.

*Asylum*: 1.66 million people globally had submitted applications for asylum in 2014, the highest level ever recorded. With an estimated 274,700 asylum claims, the Russian Federation became the largest recipient of new individual applications in 2014, followed by Germany (173,100), and the USA (121,200).

In the last couple of years, Europe in particular is struggling to cope with the large-scale influx of migrants making their way across the Mediterranean to Europe in 2015, the biggest since the aftermath of World War II,<sup>3</sup> - sparking a crisis, as countries struggle to cope with the influx, and creating division in the European Union (EU) over how best to deal with resettling people. Squalid conditions in makeshift refugee camps and heart-breaking photographs of a drowned Syrian toddler have all helped bring Europe's refugee crisis into the global spotlight. This has not stopped people making desperate bids to reach Europe. According to the UNHCR, more than 380,000 migrants and refugees have landed on Europe's southern shores so far this year, up from 216,000 arrivals in the whole of 2014. These numbers are changing on a daily basis. They are fleeing persecution, poverty and conflicts that rage beyond the continent's borders. The voyage from Libya to Italy is longer and more hazardous; but not all manage to reach safety –according to The International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>4</sup>, more than 2,700 migrants are reported to have died trying to make the crossing in 2015 - altogether, more than 3,000 people have died in the Mediterranean in 2015. These are likely to be an under-estimate.

## **WPA Call for Action:**

- ❖ WPA and Careif call for all basic health care to be provided to migrants following urgent assessments. The interventions must have a clear emphasis on the immediacy of physical care (injuries from violence, war, rapes, child birth, physical illnesses etc.) as well as on emotional and psychological care (effects of torture, violence, rapes, deaths, trauma, the journey, cultural bereavement and culture shock etc.), with particular focus on children's physical and mental health. WPA through its member societies can offer to facilitate cultural understanding and application to increase recognition of the physical and mental health needs.
  
- ❖ WPA in partnership with Careif, calls upon all Governments across the world to respect, uphold and administer The United Nations Refugee Convention (1951) with fairness and promptness and to act with humanity and compassion. At the present time governments with influence in the regions of conflict and war also with permanent positions at the UN Security Council must begin to draft solutions to resolve these conflicts and bring about an end to the crisis.
  
- ❖ WPA in partnership with Careif also calls on all Governments to act with promptness and fairness in assessing, screening and deciding on the legal status of migrants in order to reduce uncertainty and provide physical and emotional support as needed. The potential new host countries must be reassured and supported, their fears and concerns addressed and they be involved with re-settlement programmes.

- ❖ WPA and Careif call for respect and protection for individual cultural, religious and spiritual dignity. Sometimes after the long haul of the trauma and the journey- these are the most revered and stable of what people are left with and these may help their survival and resilience. Safeguards and protection are needed so as to avoid any coercion and fear.
- ❖ WPA will be conducting a series of round table conferences with experts to propose solutions for migrant families, migrant children and refugees. The purpose is to bring together experts, policymakers, advocates, media, communities, professionals, clinicians, organisations, professional bodies (public health, doctors, nurses, etc.) and other stakeholders.

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*der international law, **THE UNITED NATIONS REFUGEE CONVENTION, 1951**, refugees must not be forced back to the countries they have fled. This principle of non-refoulement (a principle of international law which forbids the rendering of a true victim of persecution to his or her persecutor) is the key provision of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which defines international law and guidelines to protect refugees. Host governments are primarily responsible for protecting refugees and most states fulfill their obligations to do so. Others, however, avoid their responsibility by pointing to a lack of resources, country is full, threats to national security, fears of domestic political de-stabilisation, or the arrival of even greater numbers of refugees. This is a violation of international law that is binding on all states.*

**A note on terminology:** *The BBC uses the term migrant to refer to all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. This group includes people fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, who governments are likely to rule are economic migrants. In the absence of any better clarification and definition of this complex issue, this BBC explanation is more compassionate and better understood.*

<sup>1</sup>UNHCR: UN Refugee Agency UK. <http://www.unhcr.org.uk>

<sup>2</sup>Refugees International. <http://www.refintl.org>

<sup>3</sup>Europe Migrant Crisis. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news>

<sup>4</sup>International Organization for Migration. <http://unitedkingdom.iom.int>

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Centre for Psychiatry - a WPA Collaborating Centre - based at Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine: Barts and The London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine & Dentistry, Old Anatomy Building: Charterhouse Square: London EC1M 6BQ: UK.

**CAREIF - Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation International Foundation** - is an **International Mental Health Charity**

<http://www.careif.org>

**Professor Dinesh Bhugra: CBE:** Professor of Mental Health and Cultural Diversity at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London: President of the World Psychiatric Association: Trustee at careif:

Contact: [dinesh.bhugra@careif.org](mailto:dinesh.bhugra@careif.org)

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