



# Refugee integration in Europe and beyond: Issues and challenges

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# Overview: Humanitarian migrant flows to European OECD countries in 2014

Asylum channel  
(application in-country)

Resettlement channel  
(via third countries or directly from origin)

820 335 applications

619 385 decisions

67%

33%

414 863  
Negative or closed

204 522  
Positive

125 314  
Convention status

79 208  
Other forms of protection

7 375  
admitted new arrivals through UNHCR

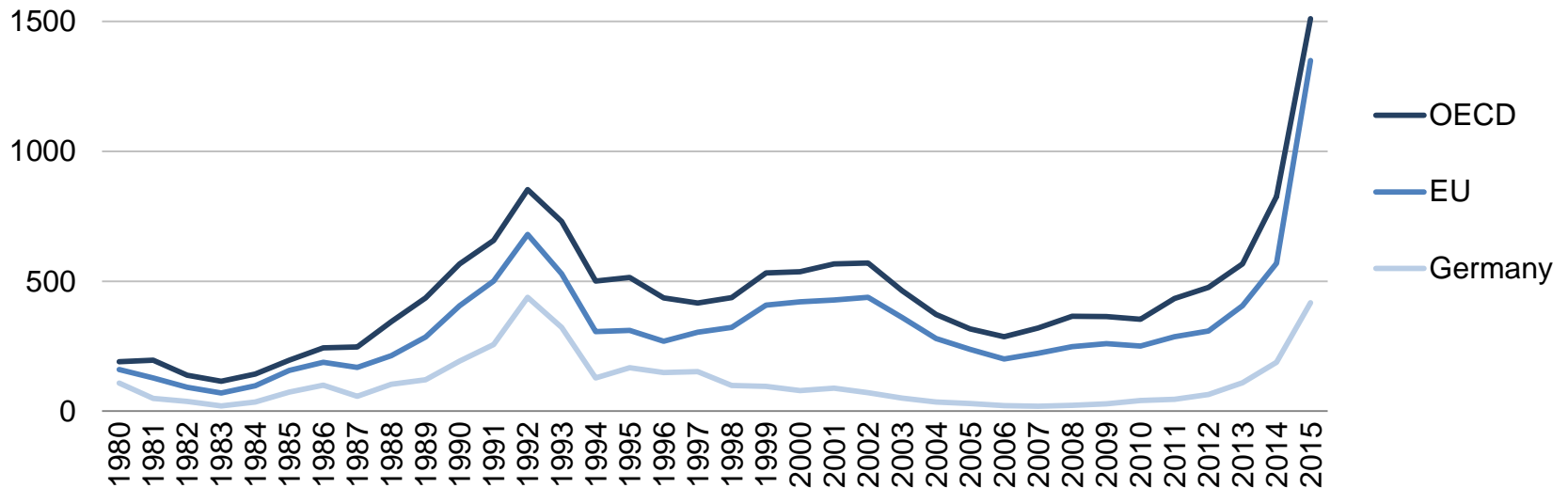
+ individual country programmes not passing through the UNHCR

> 211 897 Humanitarian migrants



# 2015 : a record year for asylum

Evolution of number of new asylum seekers, 1980-2015



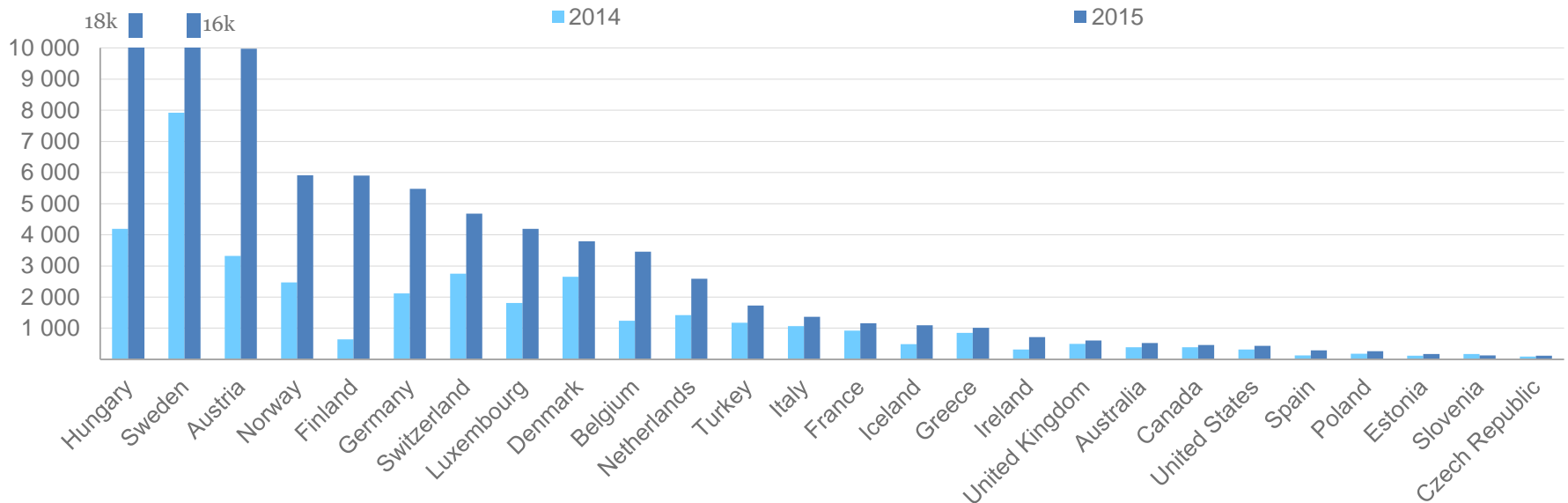
Source: UNHCR, Eurostat, OECD calculations

- Asylum applications are recorded with a lag compared to entries and may include some double counts. In 2015, the early registration system in Germany recorded over 1 million entries while UNHCR counts 442k applications).
- Almost one million Syrians sought refuge in Europe between April 2011 and January 2016
- 4.8 million refugees are in the neighbouring countries of Syria including 2.75 mio in Turkey, 1.1 mio in Lebanon and 640k in Jordan.



## *In per-capita terms, Sweden, Austria and Germany have received the highest number of asylum seekers in 2015*

New asylum seekers per million population in selected OECD countries



Source: UNHCR, OECD calculations

- Australia, Canada and the United States have also sizeable resettlement programmes and have increased their resettlement places for Syrians in 2015.
- Canada alone received more than 25 thousand Syrians in just four months between end of 2015 and April 2016.



## *Why has there been such a concentration in a handful of countries?*

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- Network effects of past migrants
- Relatively favourable labour market conditions in Austria, Germany and Sweden – at least compared with other countries
- Austria and Germany are the first countries with very high GDP after the Balkan route



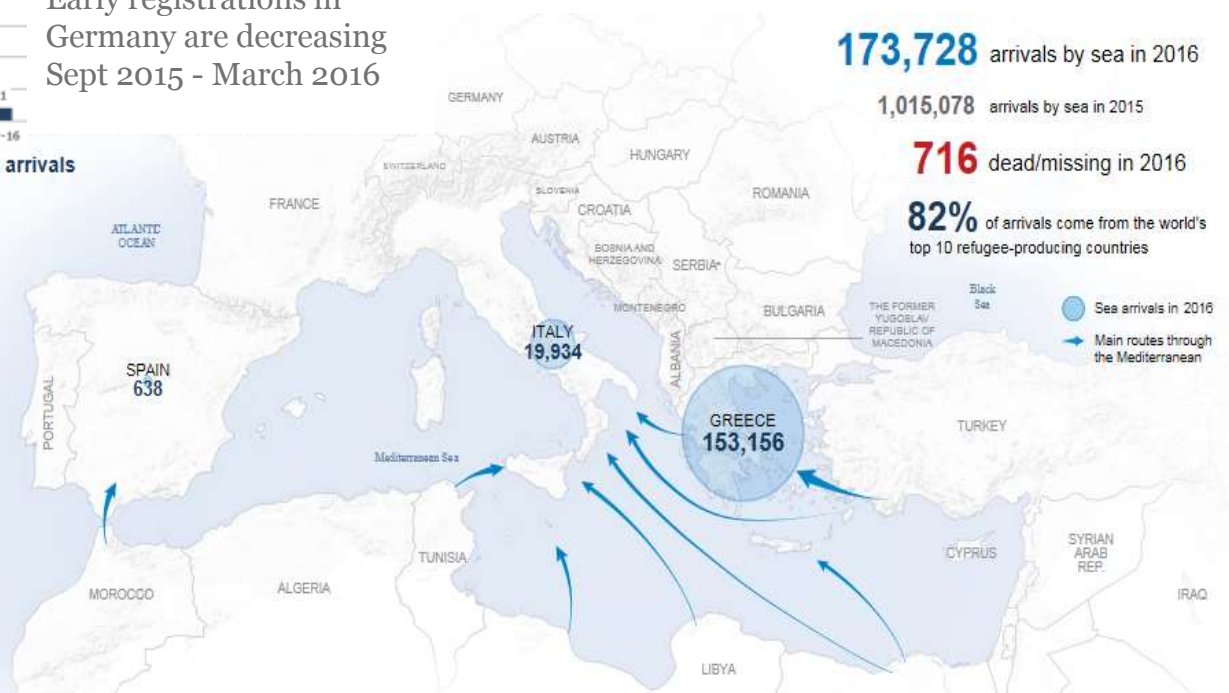
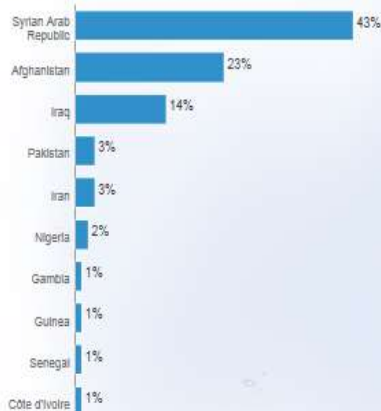
# Available data for 2016 are higher but rapidly decreasing



Early registrations in Germany are decreasing  
Sept 2015 - March 2016

## Top-10 nationalities of Mediterranean sea arrivals

Top-10 nationalities represent 92% of the sea arrivals based on arrivals since 1 Jan 2016



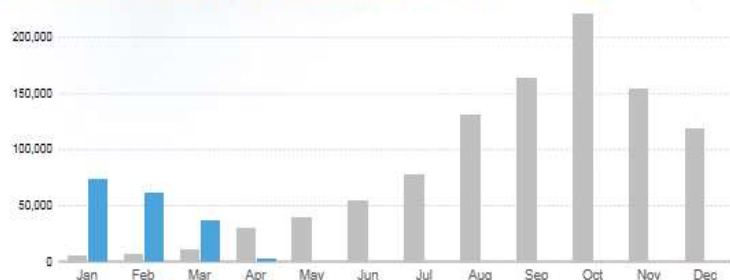
**173,728** arrivals by sea in 2016

1,015,078 arrivals by sea in 2015

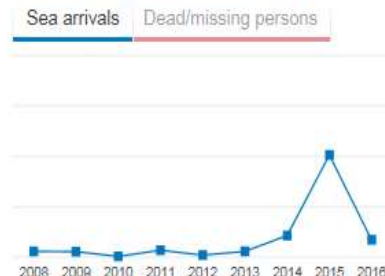
**716** dead/missing in 2016

**82%** of arrivals come from the world's top 10 refugee-producing countries

## Comparison of monthly Mediterranean sea arrivals



## Evolution - Mediterranean Sea



## Demographics based on arrivals since 1 Jan 2016



\*Serbia (AND KOSOVO); S/RES/1244 (1999) [Download excel data](#)

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

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# Why is this refugee crisis different ?

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- I. Unprecedented numbers
- II. Strong concentration of asylum seekers in just a handful of entry points and destination countries
- III. Advances in communication technology and the emergence of new smuggling routes leads to rapidly changing situations
- IV. Diversity of origin countries and deterioration of the situation in transit countries / countries of temporary refuge
- V. Unaccompanied minors
- VI. Large differences in the skills and qualifications of refugees
- VII. Many crises in parallel in countries relatively close to Europe with little prospect for improvement in the near future
- VIII. Part of the public opinion in several European countries is hostile to further migration flows, including refugees



## *Multiple unsettled crises*

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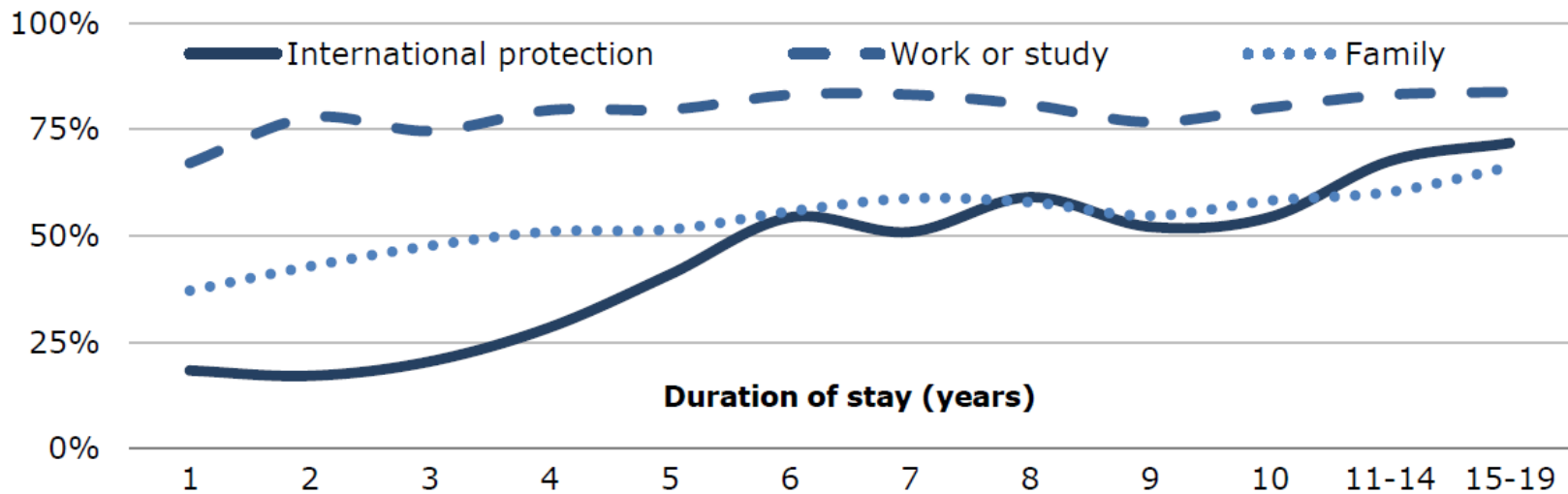
- Several conflicts/crises in parallel in countries – close to Europe – with little prospect for improvement in the near future  
=> *Persisting and looming geopolitical crises*
- Strong concentration of asylum seekers in just a handful of entry points and destination countries which raises the issue of burden sharing;  
Large unmet needs for supporting refugees globally  
=> *A solidarity and coordination crisis*
- Increasing tensions at EU external borders with active smuggling networks and migrants taking increasing risks; possible intrusions of terrorists => *A security crisis*
- Key building blocks of the European migration & asylum framework are challenged (e.g. Schengen, Dublin)  
=> *Risks of an institutional crisis*
- Welcoming and integration systems are under strong pressure and concerns regarding the integration of refugees and their children are at the highest => *A forthcoming integration crisis?*





# Labour market integration of refugees takes time and requires active support

Employment rate by immigrant categories and duration of stay in European OECD countries, 2008



Source: Eurostat Labour force survey (2008) ad-hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.



# Specific challenges for local communities

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- I. Strong concentration in certain communities
- II. Capacity of local reception and integration infrastructure
- III. Increased pressure on local (social) housing market and education system
- IV. Financing systems do not always ensure that the cost is fully reimbursed
- V. Co-ordination, both within and across levels of government



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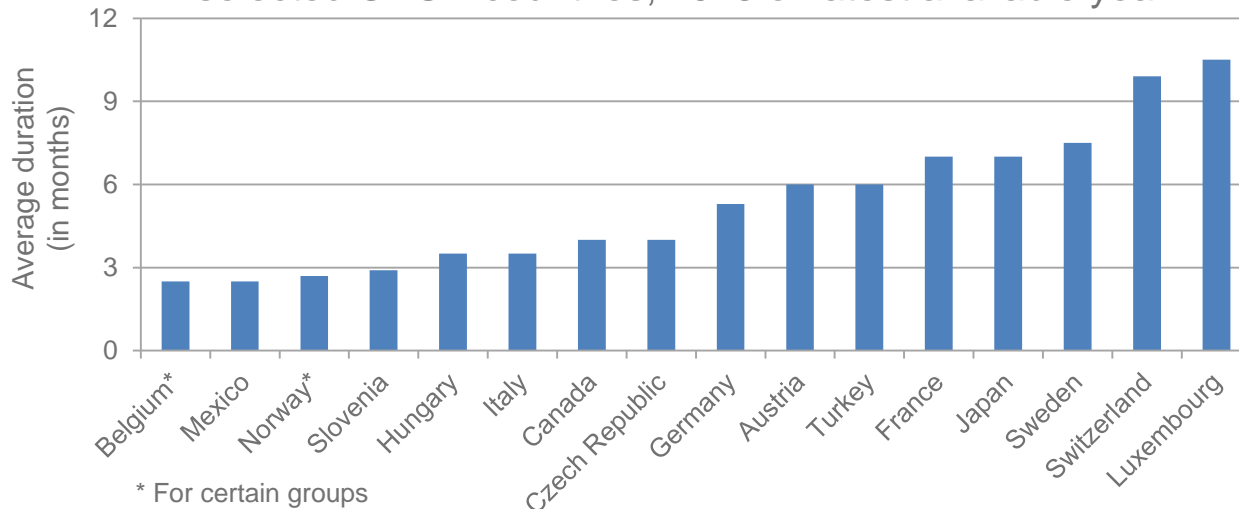
# 10 lessons on refugee integration from OECD work



# Lesson 1: Begin activation and integration services as soon as possible for humanitarian migrants and asylum seekers with high prospects to remain

- Early intervention is crucial for future integration outcomes, particularly for young children
- Where asylum procedures are lengthy, certain groups may benefit from up-front support – including language and job-preparation training, and skills assessment
- Several OECD countries have opened integration measures for certain groups of asylum seekers, including Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, US

Average duration of the asylum procedure until first instance decision, selected OECD countries, 2015 or latest available year

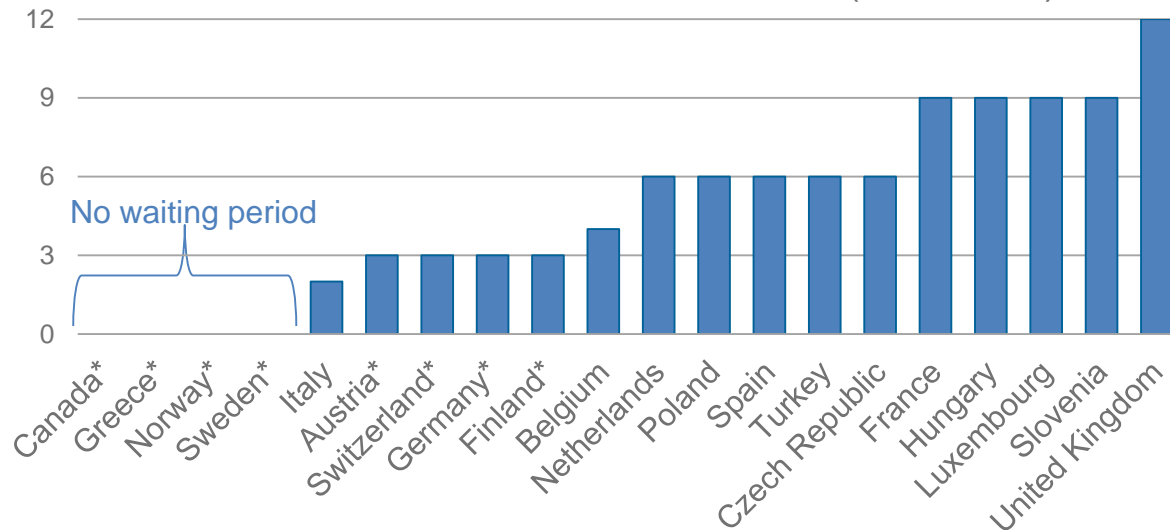




## Lesson 2: Facilitate labour market access for asylum seekers with high prospects to remain

- Early labour market entry is a key predictor for integration outcomes in the long-run
- Making labour market access subject to a waiting period and certain conditions helps preventing abuse of the asylum channel

Most favorable waiting periods for labour market access for asylum seekers in selected OECD countries, 2015 (in months)



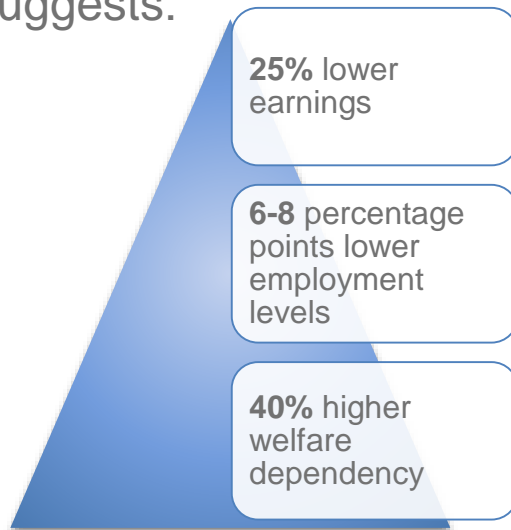
\* Under certain conditions

Source: OECD Questionnaire on the Integration of Humanitarian Migrants, 2015



## Lesson 3: Factor employment prospects into dispersal policies

- Where humanitarian migrants cannot choose their place of residence, policies usually aim at an *equal 'dispersal' across the country* – often paying little attention to employment
- But the costs for neglecting employment-related aspects are high
- Evidence from Sweden suggests:



... eight years after dispersal for refugees subject to a housing-led dispersal policy (Edin et al. 2004)

➡ To be effective, dispersal policies ideally should consider:

- ✓ skills profile of refugees
- ✓ local job vacancies
- ✓ local labour market conditions
- ✓ specific shortages
- ✓ avoid segregation

➡ Estonia, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Portugal and Sweden are among the few countries explicitly considering employment opportunities



## Lesson 4: Record and assess humanitarian migrants' foreign qualifications, work experience and skills; provide for alternative assessment methods where documentation is missing

- Refugees' qualifications and skills are often undervalued due to
  - Different education and training contexts in origin countries
  - Lack of documentation
  - No access to / awareness about existing recognition mechanisms
  - Vocational skills acquired through non-formal learning
- Several countries assess refugees' skills but few do so for asylum seekers
- Need for systematic assessment and adjusted recognition procedures

Norway



- Academic skills of refugees without verifiable documentation of their qualifications are assessed through expert committees.
- Municipalities use a three-level skills grid to assign refugees to language training.

The Netherlands



- The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum seekers maps refugees' skills as soon as they have obtained a residence permit. Alternative assessment for persons without documentation is done jointly with competent authorities, refugee organisations and business communities.

Germany



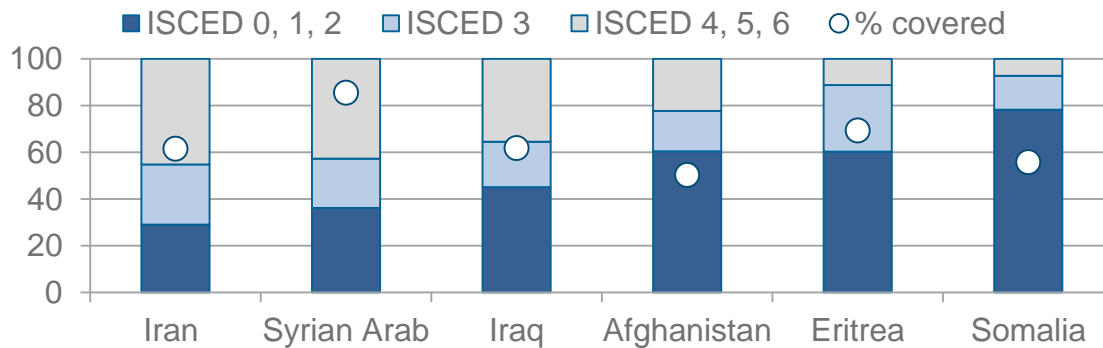
- Case workers systematically assess skills of asylum seekers in reception facilities under the 'Early Intervention' programme
- Skills of humanitarian migrants with no or insufficient documentation of qualifications are assessed through 'qualification analysis' on the basis of work samples.



## Lesson 5: Account for growing skills diversity of humanitarian migrants and develop tailor-made approaches

- The scarce available evidence suggests a large and growing diversity of refugees' qualifications and skills

Education level of immigrants aged 16-74 in Sweden by latest country of residence, 2014



Source: Statistics Sweden, 2015

- Tailor-made integration programmes ideally include:

- *Flexible* durations of integration programmes - as in Scandinavian countries

- *Modular* language training - as pioneered by Denmark

- *Targeted* courses for specific groups like illiterate, high educated and mothers

- *On-the-job* training – as in Australia, Canada and in Scandinavian countries





## Lesson 6: Identify mental and physical health issues early and provide adequate support

WHO estimates of mental health issues in adult populations affected by emergencies

	Before emergency: 12-month prevalence (median across countries)	After emergency: 12-month prevalence (median across countries)
Severe disorder	2% to 3%	3% to 4%
Mild or moderate mental disorder	10%	15% to 20%
Normal distress / other psychological reactions	No estimate	Large percentage

Source: WHO, 2012

- Physical and mental health issues are widespread and affect refugees' integration
- Tackling the issue requires that refugees have legal and effective access to targeted care services, including translation

Good practice examples:



- Sweden systematically screens asylum seekers for physical and mental health problems and refers patients to specialised centres throughout the country. In some cases, trained "health" mentors from refugee populations are used.

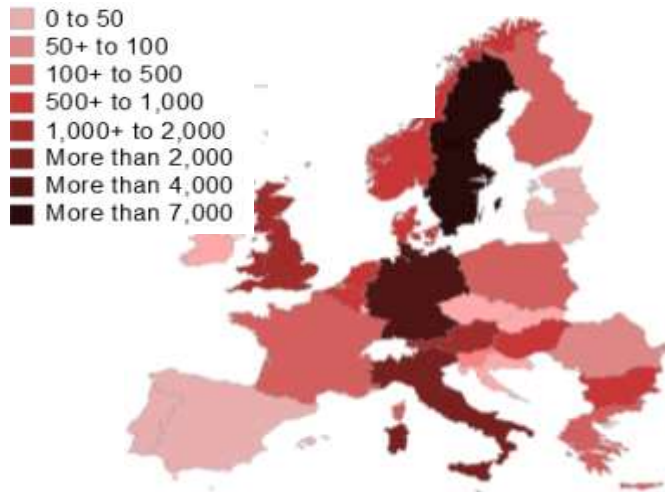


- Austria, Canada, Denmark and Finland operate centres for the treatment of severely traumatised refugees and their families!



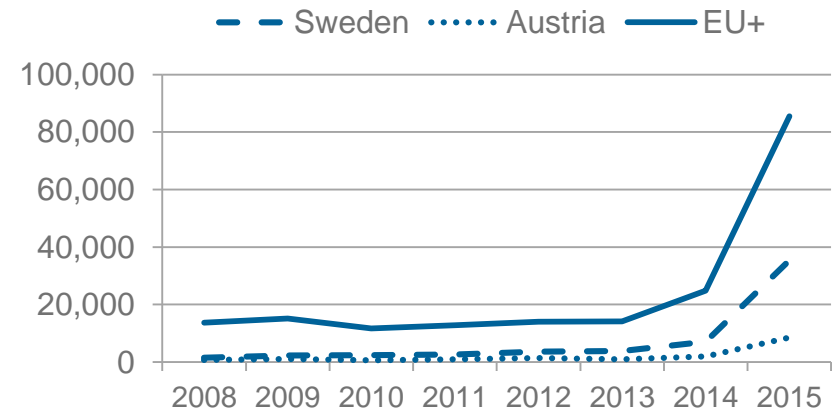
## Lesson 7: Develop support programs specific to unaccompanied minors who arrive past the age of compulsory schooling

Unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in EU28 and Norway, 2014



Source: Eurostat

Evolution of the number of unaccompanied minors in Austria, EU and Sweden



Sources: Statistics Sweden ; Austrian Ministry of the Interior; Eurostat

- Vulnerable group requiring specific (and often expensive) support
- Many arrive with little prior tuition at the end of obligatory schooling
- Specific schools should offer targeted catch-up programmes and language support preparing UAMs for further education or labour market entry; ideally complemented by case workers (e.g. *SchlauSchule* in Munich)
- Lack of parental support requires that UAMs are accommodated in specific housing with adequate support structures. This should be considered for dispersal.



## Lesson 8: Build on civil society to integrate humanitarian migrants

- Civil society creates the conditions conducive to the social and labour market integration of refugees
- It steps in where public policy does not tread or cannot be upscaled sufficiently or quickly enough.

• In the United States reception and placement services, including for unaccompanied minors, are provided by volunteer organisations

Policy implementation

Mentorship programmes

• Australia, Denmark and Norway currently run successful, larger scale mentorship programmes

• In the United States the AmeriCorps programme builds integration capacity in local communities  
• Australia and Canada have large scale community sponsorship programmes

Local community initiatives

Training and skills assessment

• In Austria and Sweden the Social Partners actively engage in refugee integration



## Lesson 9: Promote equal access to integration services to humanitarian migrants across the country

- Integration primarily takes place at the local level
- Where standards are uneven, integration prospects depend on the area of settlement rather than on the refugee's characteristics
- To limit differences, countries should

- *build and exchange* expertise in municipalities

- *provide* adequate financial support and set incentives right

- *pool* resources

- *allow* for some specialisation

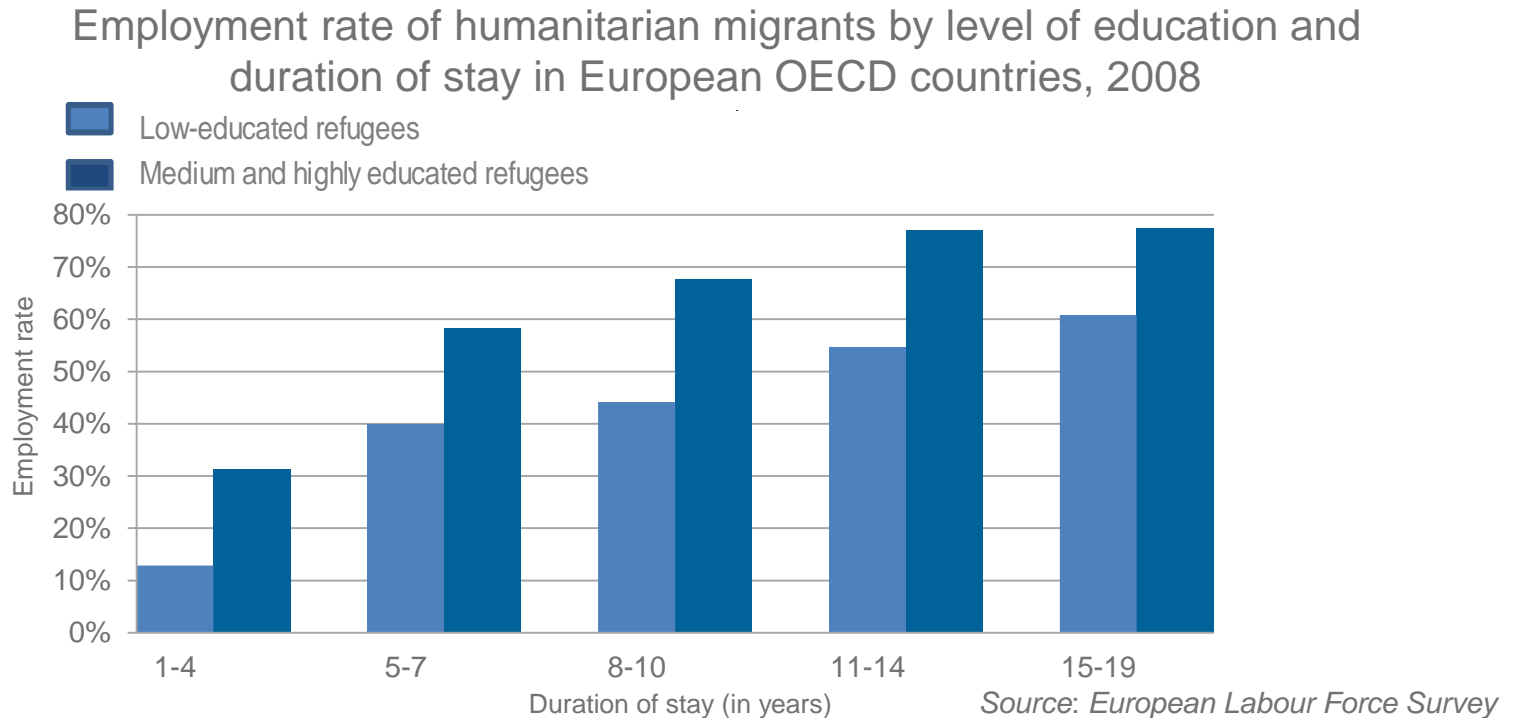
- *implement* minimum standards

- *monitor* how municipalities live up to these

- Denmark developed a benchmarking system to monitor the effectiveness municipal integration measures; Switzerland has a binding federal framework with cantonal adaptations



# Lesson 10: Acknowledge that integration of very low educated humanitarian migrants requires long-term training and support



- Reaching the minimum standards of what is needed to be employable may take several years - but this investment will pay off in the long run
  - ➔ Australia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have longer introduction programmes for very low-educated refugees
- Support needs to extend beyond training to help refugees enter employment
  - ➔ Sweden and Denmark offer stepwise labour market introduction



# Concluding remarks

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Most research and policy advances on refugee integration in the past has come from the Scandinavian countries, which also have a long humanitarian tradition

The large numbers of refugees involved raise questions regarding the possibility to upscale existing integration policies, and make it necessary to distinguish between what is desirable to provide to everybody and what is possible

Restrictive measures have costs too – in terms of possible lower integration outcomes. This raises the question of policy trade-offs, and a risk of a race to the bottom

Rapid integration into the labour market is the main thing to get right

Since integration of refugees can be costly, there is the question of financial solidarity – within and between countries

Differentiation by skills levels is key for successful integration



For further information on the OECD's work on the integration of refugees and other migrant groups:

[www.oecd.org/migration](http://www.oecd.org/migration)

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Coming soon :