How is the migrant crisis dividing EU countries?
4 March 2016

Fault lines have opened up across the European Union - both east-west and north-south - because of the migrant crisis.

Many migrants want to get asylum in Germany or Sweden, but those countries want their EU partners to show "solidarity" and share the burden.

Many have fled the conflicts and abuses in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

But there are also many economic migrants fleeing poverty in the Balkans and countries like Nigeria and Pakistan.

Why is Europe so divided over migrants?

**Austria**
Last year migrants poured into Austria from Hungary, en route to southern Germany. The authorities did not push them back.

But Austria re-imposed border checks - as did Germany on its border with Austria - as a temporary, emergency measure, allowed under Schengen rules. Slovakia - on Austria's eastern border - did so too.

The crisis caused major disruption to road and rail travel between Austria and its neighbours. Crowds of migrants gathered at Vienna's main stations, waiting for trains to take them north.

In the latest twist, Austria set new daily limits: a maximum of 80 asylum applications and 3,200 migrants in transit to other countries.

The European Commission has protested to Austria, saying those limits violate EU law.

**Denmark and Sweden**
The Danish stance on immigration is among the toughest in Europe. Controversially, Denmark has given police the power to seize valuables worth more than 10,000 kroner (€1,340; £1,000) from refugees to cover housing and food costs.

In January Sweden introduced identity checks for travellers from Denmark in an attempt to curb migrant numbers.
The clampdown has slowed transit across the Oresund bridge - a rail and bus link - as now all travellers have to present their ID at checkpoints. And rail commuters have to change trains at Copenhagen Airport.

More than 160,000 asylum seekers arrived in Sweden in 2015, more per capita than any other country in Europe.

**France**

French demolition squads have been tearing down migrant shacks at the "Jungle" - a squalid campsite in Calais, where about 4,000 migrants are hoping to get across the Channel to the UK.

Basic, clean shelters have been erected instead - but migrants yearning to reach the UK do not want to stay there, and are avoiding registration.

Flimsy migrant shacks have been torn down in a drive to bring order to the "Jungle" camp. The UK has immigration checkpoints at Calais and Dunkirk, under an agreement with France.

There have been warnings that France could end that arrangement if British voters reject EU membership in the UK's June in-out referendum.

Most of the Calais migrants are from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea or Sudan.

France re-imposed police checks on its border with Belgium after the November Paris attacks, in which jihadists murdered 130 people.

News that two of the killers had passed through Greece fuelled alarm about freedom of movement under Schengen.

Marine Le Pen's National Front (FN) is a major force in French politics - it is anti-EU and deplores mass immigration.

**Germany**

Around 1.1 million asylum seekers arrived in Germany in 2015 - a record number. That put great strain on local authorities, who had to create emergency campsites.

Hanau, Germany: Soldiers were deployed to build temporary accommodation for migrants. Chancellor Angela Merkel says Germany will look after genuine refugees, fulfilling its international humanitarian duty.

That welcome does not extend to the many economic migrants. Those from Balkan countries like Kosovo, Albania and Serbia can now being sent back - Germany recently classified those countries as "safe".

Mrs Merkel has been much criticised for her "open door" policy on refugees. The critics include fellow conservatives, notably the Bavarian CSU party.

Last year there was an outpouring of sympathy and help for the new arrivals from many ordinary Germans.
But there were also many street protests by the right-wing Pegida movement, which claims to be defending Germany from "Islamisation".

There have been hundreds of attacks on migrant hostels - usually empty buildings allocated for new arrivals. In many cases they were gutted by fire.

Anxiety was fuelled by the Cologne attacks, when hundreds of women were assaulted at New Year, many of them sexually molested. Victims and witnesses mostly blamed gangs of migrant men from North Africa.

Germany wanted its EU partners to accept mandatory quotas, to spread the migrants EU-wide. France, Italy and Greece backed Germany on that - but EU leaders as a whole decided on a voluntary scheme.

**Italy**
Last summer Greece became the main Mediterranean gateway for migrants - previously it had been Italy.

Several factors have made it riskier for migrants to head for Italy by boat: hundreds have drowned in repeated disasters at sea; war-torn Libya is extremely dangerous; the voyage is longer - even to Lampedusa, a tiny island near Tunisia.

More EU resources have been put into Frontex, the border agency now monitoring migrant routes from Libya. But EU officials say a bigger effort is needed, as the sea area is vast.

Italy is angry that some EU partners are so unwilling to share the migrant burden. Its reception centres - especially in Lampedusa and Sicily - are overcrowded, like those in Greece.

**Greece**
The Greek islands near Turkey are the main focus of EU attention, as thousands of migrants continue to come ashore there daily.

A rescue off Lesbos: Overcrowded migrant dinghies are a common sight. For months tensions have been escalating between Greece and some of its EU partners. They accuse Athens of deliberately waving through migrants who ought to be registered as soon as they enter the EU.

The row with Austria got so bad in February that Greece withdrew its ambassador to Vienna.

Greece insists that it cannot become Europe's holding centre for migrants - it demands fair burden-sharing.

In January-February this year more than 120,000 migrants arrived in Greece - out of more than 130,000 who crossed the Mediterranean to reach the EU, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said.

The total in just two months was nearly as many as in the first half of 2015.
So far this year more than 400 migrants have drowned in the Aegean Sea, highlighting how risky the journey is.

The EU has given Greece until 12 May to fix "serious deficiencies" in its control of the EU’s external border in the Aegean.

Four extra reception centres - called "hotspots" - are nearly ready on the islands.

The EU plans to give Greece €700m (£544m; $769m) in emergency aid to tackle the crisis. It is the first use inside the EU of funds earmarked for humanitarian disasters outside the EU.
Hungary

Last year Hungary became a gateway for migrants bound for Germany.

It became the focus of world attention when Hungarian riot police fired water cannon and tear gas at a big crowd of migrants at the border with Serbia in September.

Hungarian riot police clashed with migrants at Roszke on the Serbian border. There was widespread criticism of Hungary for its decision to build a razor-wire fence and prosecute migrants entering illegally. But many Hungarians supported their government's tough stance, according to reports.

After completing the Serbia section Hungary extended the fence to stop migrants entering from Croatia.

The conservative Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has said Europe's Christian heritage is under threat because most of the migrants are Muslims. He accused Germany of encouraging the influx by welcoming so many migrants.

Hungary and its northern neighbour Slovakia refuse to be part of an EU quota plan for distributing 160,000 migrants across the EU. They are currently in Greece and Italy - and so far fewer than 600 have been transferred.

The European Court of Justice is now considering a Hungarian-Slovak complaint against the EU.

Macedonia

A migrant bottleneck has built up on the Greece-Macedonia border since Macedonia put up a razor-wire fence at the Gevgelija-Idomeni border crossing.

More than 10,000 migrants are camping in squalid conditions near the fence. Some - children among them - are sleeping rough in icy conditions, with little food or medical help.

At least 2,000 people queue for food every morning in Idomeni. Some of Macedonia's Balkan neighbours have sent border guards to help police the new flashpoint. Anger boiled over in early March, with migrants battering down a gate before police fired tear gas to chase them away.

Migrants continue flocking to the border because they want to get to northern Europe. Yet under the EU's controversial Dublin Regulation, a migrant's asylum claim is supposed to be processed in the country where he/she first arrives.

Macedonia also hopes to join the EU, but this crisis is just adding to the obstacles in its bid.

Its migrant policy appears discriminatory: it has been letting in small numbers of Syrians and Iraqis, but not Afghans.
Turkey
Improving co-operation with Turkey on the migrants issue is a top priority for the EU.

But progress has been very slow. Meanwhile, people-smugglers in Turkey remain very adept at shipping desperate migrants across the Aegean, for extortionate fees.
Turkey is reluctant to readmit large numbers of migrants - but it is under intense EU pressure now to do so.

Under the current rules, only migrants who have no right to international protection can be sent back to Turkey. That means economic migrants. The reason is that only one EU country considers Turkey "safe" for returning migrants. EU data shows that 23% of asylum claims from migrants of Turkish origin were deemed well-founded in 2014.

Turkey is demanding a high price for its co-operation, arguing that it has already spent €8bn helping refugees from the Syrian war. It is struggling with the influx, already housing 2.5 million in camps.

As a candidate to join the EU, Turkey wants to see real progress in its accession negotiations. The EU has pledged that, and is offering visa-free travel for Turkish citizens in the Schengen passport-free zone.

Historic tension between Greece and Turkey makes the Aegean operation to stem the migrant flow difficult - as does Turkey's long, zig-zagging coastline.

How some European countries are tightening their refugee policies
By Judith Vonberg
22 February 2017

US President Donald Trump is expected to sign a new executive order this week that would temporarily halt travel from citizens of seven nations he says pose a high risk of terrorism.

Before it was halted in the courts, his initial order -- which banned travel for citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries, barred all refugees for 120 days, and refugees from Syria indefinitely -- caused chaos at airports and prompted outrage around the world.

German chancellor Angela Merkel warned against imposing a "general suspicion" on all Muslims; French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said that welcoming refugees was "a duty of solidarity."

But many European countries are beginning to curb their own refugee programs, after years of pressure caused by high levels of migration.

At least 12,472 refugees and migrants have arrived on Europe's shores since the beginning of 2017, according to the UN refugee agency -- only slightly less than the 12,587 Syrian refugees admitted by the US in all of last year.

Since the arrival of over one million migrants and refugees in Europe in 2015, governments across Europe have sought to fortify their
countries' borders with fences, walls and guards against future mass migrations.

"The year 2015 must not be allowed to be repeated," said Austria's Defense Minister Hans Peter Doskozil.

This month, representatives from 15 countries met to discuss fortifying their borders to make it harder for migrants to reach central and western parts of Europe.

And earlier this year, EU leaders outlined plans to "stem the flow" of migrants traveling across the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy, and boost the ability of the EU to send people back.

"The key priority is reducing the flow without any consideration for the causes of migration," Dr Nando Sigona, an expert in migration at Birmingham University's School of Social Policy, told CNN.

"By closing down the routes they are making people even more vulnerable to danger and violence."

Here's how some European countries have been making changes:

United Kingdom | Germany | Italy | The Netherlands | Serbia | Hungary | Slovenia | Poland

UK: Child refugee program halted

The UK government recently announced it was halting a program to resettle lone refugee children, after 350 had been brought to Britain. Campaigners had hoped that 3,000 children would benefit from the scheme, introduced last year.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd told the House of Commons the government did not want the so-called Dubs amendment to act as a "pull factor" encouraging unaccompanied minors to travel to Europe: "We do not want to incentivize perilous journeys to Europe, particularly by the most vulnerable children."

Alfred Dubs, who came to the UK as a child refugee on the "Kindertransport" from the Czech Republic in 1939 and who designed the program, expressed his dismay at the decision. "It's bitterly disappointing," the Labour politician told CNN's Christiane Amanpour. "I think they wanted to shut the thing down and found any excuse to do it."

NGO Help Refugees is taking legal action against the government over their handling of the Dubs amendment. In a statement, they allege that the Home Secretary's "failure to implement her Dubs duties towards unaccompanied children in Calais ... contributed to [them] being exposed to serious human rights violations." The case will be heard in June.

The government's move is just the latest in a series of measures designed to reduce the number of child refugees eligible to come to the UK.

In November 2016, the Home Office issued new guidance barring unaccompanied refugees from Afghanistan, Yemen and Eritrea older than 12, who were living in the now-demolished "Jungle" camp at Calais in northern France, from entering the UK if they have no family there.

The following month the government ended the process of transferring children from France after resettling 750 of the 1,900 registered minors, according to Human Rights Watch. Rudd said she was "proud" of the UK government's "active approach to helping and sheltering the most vulnerable."

Germany: Asylum seekers returned
A Syrian refugee holds a picture of German Chancellor Angela Merkel as he and hundreds of others arrive in Munich.

More than 250,000 people were given refugee status in Germany in 2016, many of whom had arrived the previous year when Chancellor Angela Merkel threw the country's doors open to refugees, but there are signs that attitudes are hardening.

In accordance with European Commission recommendations, from March, Germany will begin returning asylum seekers to Greece, if that was the first safe country in which they arrived, a spokeswoman for the German Ministry for the Interior told CNN. This process was halted in 2011 due to "systemic deficiencies in the Greek asylum system."

Pro Asyl, a German organization that advocates for the rights of refugees criticized the decision to send "more people into the miserable conditions" in Greece and condemned the transfer system as "inhumane."

A recent report by Amnesty International highlighted the "dire conditions" in Greek camps, citing "overcrowding, freezing temperatures, lack of hot water and heating, poor hygiene, bad nutrition, inadequate medical care, violence and hate-motivated attacks."

In a further sign of changing views, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere recently announced that border controls with Austria -- introduced as a short-term measure in September 2015 -- would continue indefinitely.

If Europe cannot reliably protect its external borders, De Maiziere said in a speech, Germany will implement "appropriate national border controls against illegal immigration."

This month, Germany also deported a second tranche of asylum seekers to Afghanistan, despite the UNHCR's insistence that "the entire state ... is affected by an armed conflict."

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) argues that "by carrying out these deportations, the Federal Ministry of the Interior is completely ignoring the security situation in Afghanistan."

**Italy: Calls for deportation of migrants**

Thousands of immigrants risk their lives trying to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa in rickety, overloaded boats.

Italy's chief of police, Franco Gabrielli, has called for the detention and deportation of migrants, who he blames for "instability and threats" in the country. Gabrielli's comments, published in a circular on December 30, 2016, align closely with the government's position.

Why migrants are risking their lives to reach Italy

Italy's Interior Minister, Marco Minniti, has announced that one new detention center will be opened in every region, that asylum assessments will be speeded up, and that the ministry will double the funds available for voluntary returns.

The Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI) has strongly criticized the proposals, expressing its "full opposition to the opening of new identification and expulsion centers ... as well as any type of action ... which results in an increase of automatic expulsion orders without adequate assessment of individual situations."

**The Netherlands: Election sparks rethink**

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte has adopted a zero-tolerance approach to immigrants who are
unwilling to sign up to the country's way of life, telling those who "refuse to adapt and criticize our values" to "behave normally or go away."

Geert Wilders: Why voters are flocking to the Dutch

In the open letter, published on his VVD party's website, Rutte talked of the "growing discomfort" felt by Dutch people when those who have recently arrived in the Netherlands abuse the freedom that the country offers.

"We must continue to make clear what is normal and what is not normal in this country," he wrote. "We will have to actively defend our values."

The letter echoes his party's election manifesto, which argues that the current migration system is "untenable" and promises to speed up deportations. The party pledges to invest in caring for refugees in the Middle East in order to reduce the number traveling to Europe.

Center-right PM Rutte is facing a closely-fought election battle with far-right anti-immigration politician Geert Wilders. Wilders was recently convicted of inciting discrimination.

**Serbia: Newcomers fear being sent back**

Several hundred migrants and refugees are currently living in derelict -- and freezing cold -- warehouses in the Serbian capital, Belgrade.

Aleksandar Vulin, Serbia's Minister for Labour, Employment, Veterans' and Social Affairs, insists the government has provided facilities for all migrants in the country.

And Ivan Miskovic, from Serbia's Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, says that the migrants who are living in the depot are there because they have refused to claim asylum.

But Amnesty International researcher Todor Gardos told CNN many of them are "afraid of going to the accommodation centers."

"There is not a functioning asylum system in Serbia and many people are worried they will just be sent back to the border with Macedonia or Bulgaria, which is a real concern," he said.

**Hungary: Asylum seekers face detention**

The Hungarian parliament introduced a bill on February 14 that requires the police to deport any person who is in Hungary illegally, without allowing any access to an asylum procedure, according to a written statement by the NGO The Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

The bill also requires all asylum applications to be automatically held in detention until their claim is processed, according to the NGO.

The NGO describes the proposed changes as "extreme and flagrant violations of European Union asylum law."

Hungary has also recently been accused by Save the Children of unlawfully forcing refugees and migrants back across the border in secret.
"In the last two months, 1,600 cases of illegal push-backs from Hungary and Croatia have been alleged by refugees and migrants, who've been forced -- often violently -- back into Serbia, despite already crossing its border," the NGO said in a report.

According to the UNHCR, Hungary recently cut the number of asylum seeker applications allowed at its border crossings from 20 per weekday to 10.

"The Hungarian authorities are doing everything they can to keep people out," said Amnesty International's Todor Gardos.

**Slovenia: Powers to close border**

Slovenia's President recently granted the country's parliament the power "to effectively 'close the borders' if this was deemed necessary due to a serious threat ... caused by migrations," according to the Legal-informational centre for NGOs (PIC).

PIC says the amendment to the country's Aliens Act means "all persons arriving irregularly and expressing an attempt for asylum would be forcefully returned without their asylum claims being heard."

Prime Minister Miro Cerar has hinted that such measures could be introduced in the near future.

"We cannot allow a repeat of such mass migrations as we experienced earlier," he insisted at a press conference. "Our country will help for as long as it has available capacity but then it will have to resort to other measures."

The UNHCR has expressed deep concern about the law, which it says "jeopardize[s] the rights of those fleeing war and persecution to seek asylum."

**Poland: Illegal migrants face expulsion**

The Polish government has proposed similar changes to those introduced by Slovenia. According to the ECRE, Poland's draft amendments include "new provisions on border proceedings and the possibility of detention without alternatives."

Introducing the plan, the country's Interior Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said "the main concern is security, followed by sealing the borders, and thirdly the introduction of procedures facilitating the expulsion of people entering -- or trying to enter -- Poland illegally."

The ECRE reports that the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) is concerned that some of the changes are contrary to EU law and the European Convention on Human Rights.
For further research:

**Nobody move! Myths of the EU migration crisis**

13 December 2017
By Roderick Parkes

[https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_143%20Migration.PDF](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_143%20Migration.PDF)

**Understanding Migration and Asylum in the European Union**

December 2016
By the Open Society Initiative for Europe