

Irregular migration – a comprehensive approach

01 October 2015 |

Irregular migration is the biggest crisis facing Europe today. More than 400,000 people have tried to cross the Mediterranean in to Europe so far this year, primarily from the Middle East and Africa. Many come from Syria, where the conflict has forced some 12 million people to abandon their homes.

A comprehensive approach

The UK's consistent focus has been on providing a comprehensive solution to the refugee crisis, which deals with the causes of the crisis, not just responding to the consequences.

A comprehensive approach means helping to stabilise countries where the refugees are coming from (and through); seeking a solution to the crisis in Syria; pushing for the formation of a new unity government in Libya; creating conditions for economic opportunity in sub-Saharan Africa; providing peacekeepers in the Horn of Africa; busting the criminal gangs who are profiting from this human tragedy; and playing our part in saving lives in the Mediterranean, where our Royal Navy and Border Force cutters have rescued over 6,700 people.

As part of the UK's response to the crisis, the Prime Minister announced earlier this month that the UK will resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable refugees from the region neighboring Syria (Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon), rather than those already in Europe. That means we can help the most vulnerable people. It should also discourage people from making that dangerous journey into Europe which has seen so many lives lost. Our humanitarian support (we are the second largest donor in the world in response to the Syria crisis) also helps make life more liveable for the millions of refugees in the region displaced from their homes in Syria, making it more likely that they will choose to stay closer to their home rather than travel to Europe.

In Europe, we need to break the link for economic migrants between making this dangerous journey and settling in Europe. We need to return those people who are illegal economic migrants and who have no right to be here. We need to ensure that people arriving at Europe's borders are being properly dealt with so that decisions can be made and when they are illegal economic migrants, they can be returned.

Where we are now

Last week the Prime Minister attended the [Extraordinary European Council](#), where EU leaders agreed more support for countries struggling to cope with refugees both in the Syria region and in transit, assistance for front-line member states, strengthening EU border controls and other measures. The Council agreed with the Prime Minister's position that Europe needs more than ever to tackle the migration crisis through action in the regions from where these people are coming.

At the [UN General Assembly in New York](#) on Tuesday night, the Foreign Secretary put the spotlight on the root causes of this crisis, setting out the UK priorities, including calling to redouble efforts for a Syria peace process and step up humanitarian support to those fleeing from brutality. He highlighted UK leadership in tackling the instability in Somalia, Yemen, Syria and Libya, which drives migration and violent extremism, and stressed the importance of supporting people displaced by the conflict as close as possible to their homes, "Because there will be a new Syria to build and the country will need to draw on the talent of the Syrian people."

What is the FCO doing?

Ed Hobart has been appointed the FCO's migration envoy, leading the FCO's input into Whitehall, coordinating across the FCO network, and engaging with partners in the EU and in source and transit countries.

FCO teams across Europe and beyond are preparing for a conference on the [Eastern Mediterranean](#) route (Turkey/Greece/Western Balkans) on 8 October in Luxembourg, which will be attended by the EU, EU Accession countries, Lebanon, Jordan, and the UN. A summit in [Valletta](#) on 11 to 12 November brings together the EU and African countries to identify further cooperation on migration and its causes.

Migration is also on the agenda again for the next European Council attended by the Prime Minister on 15 to 16 October 2015.

The future

The flow of migrants from Africa and the Middle East will continue until the root causes are addressed. The UK will continue to work closely with our partners in the European Union, the Middle East, Africa and beyond to do this. Migration is likely to remain high on the agenda for many across the FCO network and working on the FCO platform for some time.

For more information, contact Edward Hobart, FCO Migration Envoy.