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## A Five-Year Integration Plan for Syrian Refugees Residing in Italian Refugee Camps

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A Five-Year Integration Plan for Syrian Refugees Residing in Italian Refugee Camps

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## A Five-Year Integration Plan for Syrian Refugees Residing in Italian Refugee Camps

### **Migration into Europe**

The refugee crises in Africa and Asia are creating the largest level of misplaced people in the world since World War II (The UN Refugee Agency, 2015). According to the UNHCR (2015), “Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If this were the population of a country, it would be the world’s 24<sup>th</sup> biggest.” The pressing matter of misplaced persons in the world can no longer be ignored. War torn governments and poor living conditions are forcing people to seek asylums with safety regulations, higher living standards, and political structure. Europe, for many, is currently that asylum. Last year, numbers showed that Europe held the largest amount of misplaced people in the world at 51 percent (UNHCR, 2015).

The number of migrants pouring into Europe surpassed 60 million in 2014, and this number has continued to rise as more people are choosing to seek safety within European borders (Nordland, 2015). Refugees, specifically, are doing anything they can to reach the safety European borders bring. Figure 1 created by data collected from Eurostat shows the most common routes refugees from surrounding countries were entering Europe in the year 2015 (Eurostat, 2016).

# European Migrant Crisis 2015

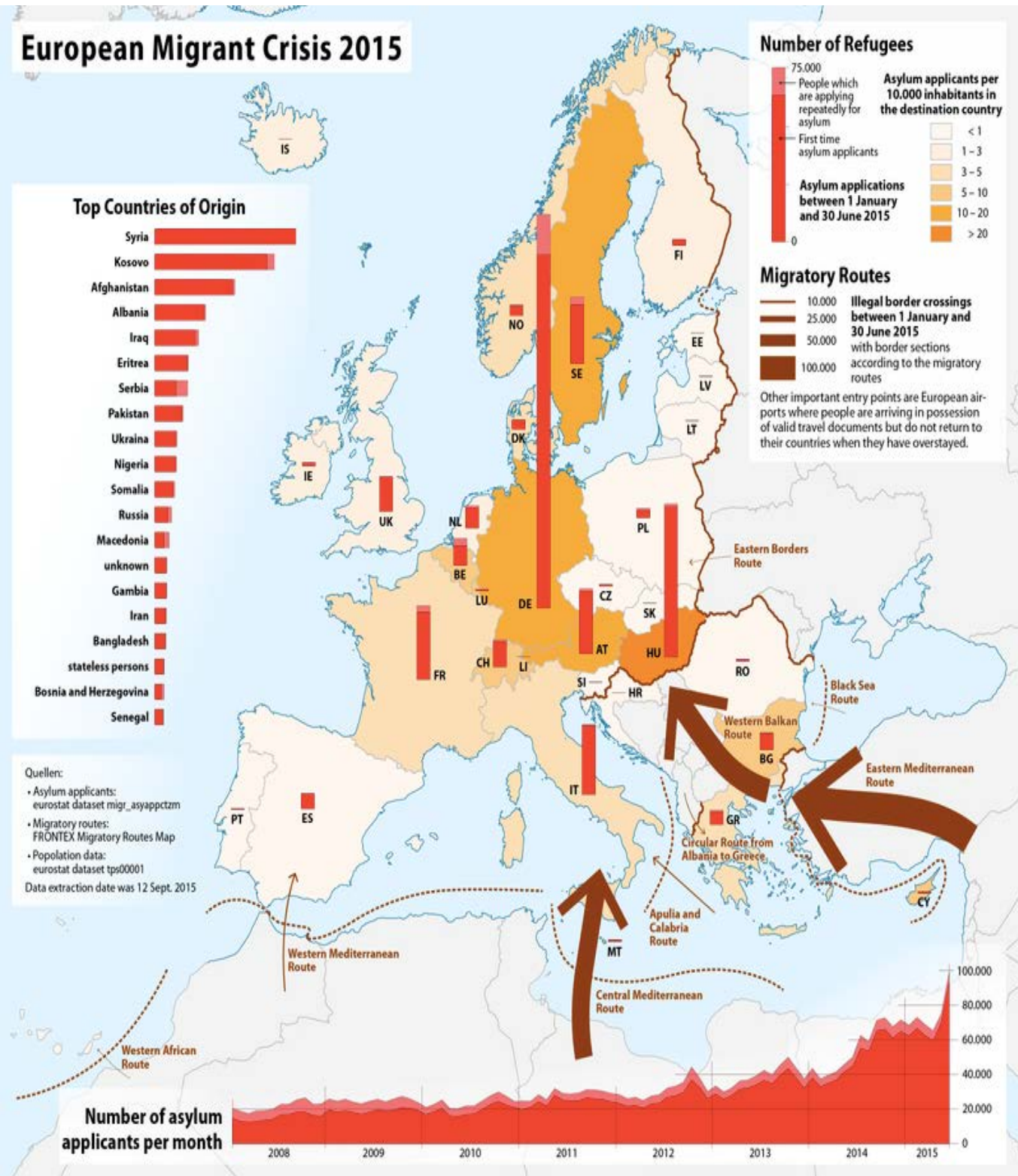


Figure 1

Refugees are entering Europe by both land and water. Many are choosing to flee by boat through the Mediterranean Sea while others hope to make it through border controls in countries like Greece and Bulgaria. Although both options are widely used, entering European borders by arriving at sea is becoming a more common trend. A major reason for this trend is from a recent agreement created by the European Union and Turkey declaring any refugee found within Europe Union countries must return to Turkey if they previously migrated from there (Connor, 2016).

### **European Migration Turning into a Crisis**

While the way refugees are entering Europe has recently been changing, the upward slope of increasing misplaced people within Europe has not. The growing number of refugees within Europe has become so pressing that this past year the European Union declared the issue as a migrant crisis, officially calling it, "The European Migrant Crisis." Countries that are suffering from the millions of misplaced refugees have shifted from inland countries such as Germany and Estonia to coastal countries such as Greece, Italy, and Spain. This change of concern is due to the shifting trend of refugees entering through the Mediterranean Sea.

European agencies and organizations have been forced to act upon the crisis to keep peace among the existing citizens. The Migrant Policy Center (MPC) located in Florence, Italy for example has been trying to predict trends to contain the crisis from expanding further (Migration Policy Center, 2016). As shown in Figure 2, the MPC and EU countries are showing an increasing concern for incoming migrants (Migration Policy Center, 2016). In 2013, Germany and Estonia had the highest

immigration concerns at 49 – 65 percent of their population believing it was a pressing issue. Today, coastal countries are matching increasing immigration concern.

### Immigration has become the first concern of EU citizens, Eurobarometer reveals.

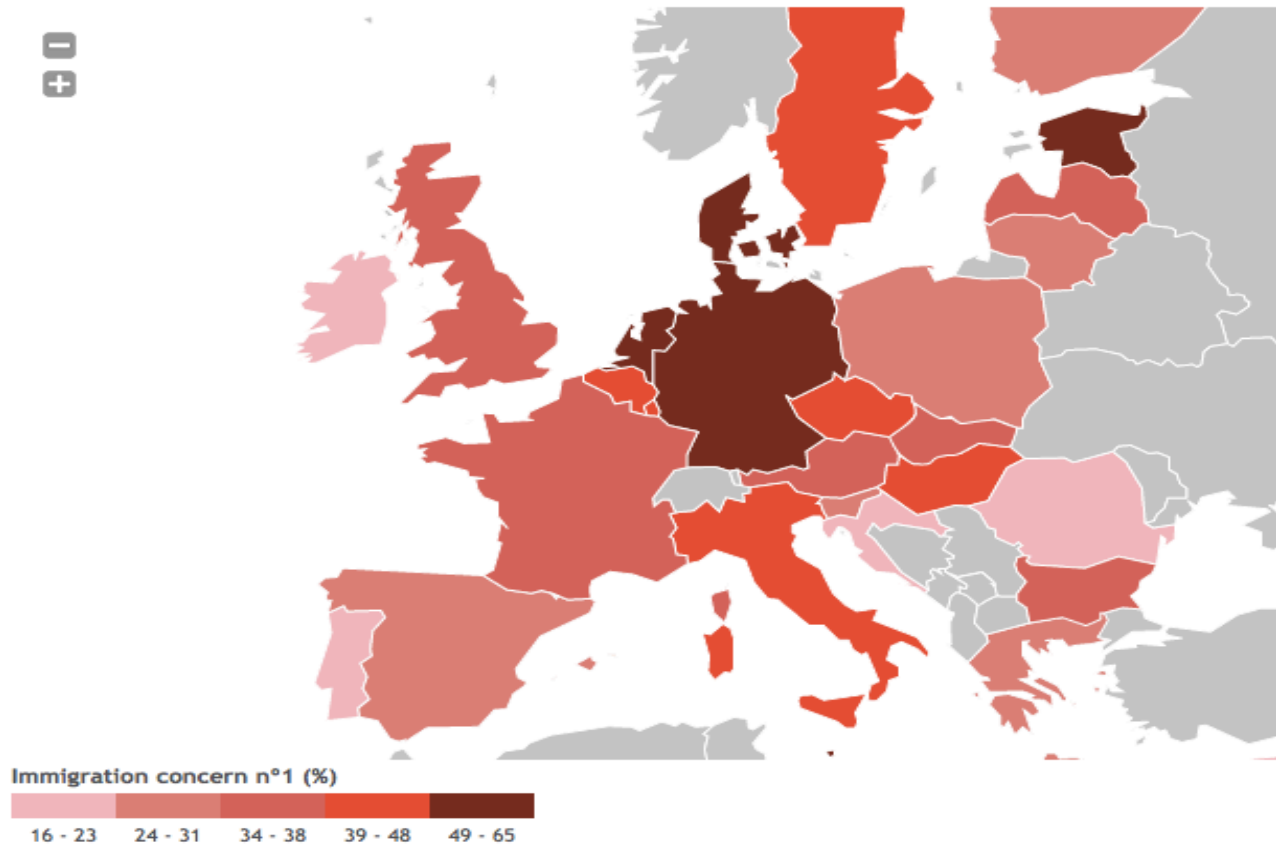


Figure 2

#### The Syrian War

Syria, a Middle Eastern country, is currently in a civil war between multi-sided armed forces ranging from government organizations to rebel groups. The war began in 2011 and has since grown in factions, numbers, and violence (Mercy Corps, 2016). There have been multiple ceasefire attempts, but all have ended in failure due to either corrupt leadership or religious radicals. There are currently five



different power groups controlling various areas in Syria. Figure 3 shows Syria split into these sections by color of the rebel or government group ruling the area (Euronews, 2013).

### Map of the Syrian conflict, June 2013

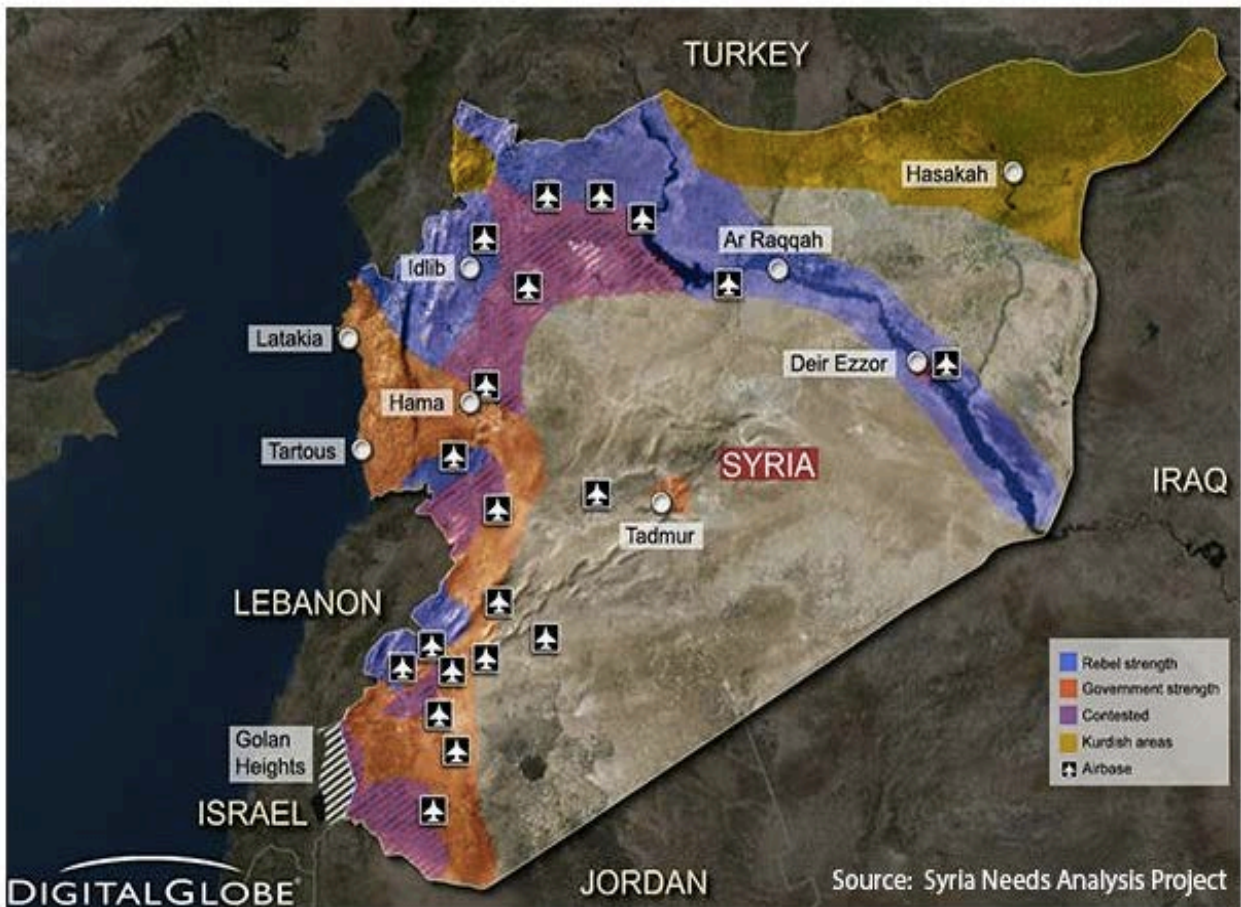


Figure 3

The Syrian War is one of the major reasons the European Migration crisis has grown so rapidly. The cruelty many of these factions practice has created a sense of panic and helplessness throughout the country that is so prominent that 11 million citizens have already fled, and 4.8 million of these refugees are seeking help from neighboring countries (Mercy Corps, 2016). The European Union reported nearly 50



percent (46.7) of the refugees entering the continent from the Mediterranean Sea from January 2015 to March 2016 were Syrian (UNHCR, 2016). With no end in sight for the raging war in Syria, this number is expected to continue to rise.

### **Italy as a Refugee Asylum**

Italy is being observed by the rest of the Europe Union to provide an example for the rest of the countries as the Italian government continues to try and absorb the growing number of refugees within its borders. The process is a challenge culturally, economically, and geographically. Culturally, the Italian public understands immigration is a concern. According to the Migration Policy Center (2016), "One in three Italians declared that immigration is one of the main issues facing the country". The media and civil society have responded to this crisis with both negative and positive demonstrations, but Italian society heavily emphasizes the importance of family stature and heritage making it difficult for refugees to integrate into society whether or not the public opinion is positive.

Integration will also be made difficult by the economic accessibility most Syrian refugees will lack. Most refugees when first arriving will not be able to perform basic Italian formalities or be able to practice advanced necessities like speaking the native language. This will make their economic mobility restricted. Italy is also undergoing a crisis. The country is reviving itself from bankruptcy, but the process is slow due to non-performing loans. Poor refugees coming into Italy are subject to challenge economic prosperity making them unwelcome by many.

Geographically, Italy is mountainous making foot travel difficult and train transportation long. This will inhibit refugees from traveling outside the country's

borders into neighboring countries once they arrive. A European Union regulation also makes traveling out of Italy difficult after arriving. The Dublin III Regulation modified in 2013 is challenging Italy as a refugee asylum because it states that any, “... Member State (is) responsible for the examination of the asylum application” (Migration and Home Affairs, 2016). This means that any refugee entering Italy and filing for an asylum application is Italy’s responsibility there after. Italy’s geographic location allows refugees easily in, and laws and topography keep them from easily moving out.

### **Possible Refugee Integration Methods**

Developing successful integration methods for Syrian refugees will not be an easy task for Italy nor the Syrian people; however, it is the next step that must be taken. In 2014, the country experienced the largest surge of migrants entering their country at 170 million (International Organization of Migration, 2016). There was a decrease in migrants in 2015, but numbers have begun increasing once again. These trends can be seen in Figure 5 (ISMU, 2016). The growing number of refugees flooding into Italy is pushing the Italian government to create new ways to aid and absorb refugees.

## Refugees and Migrants Arriving in Italy by Sea, 1997–2015

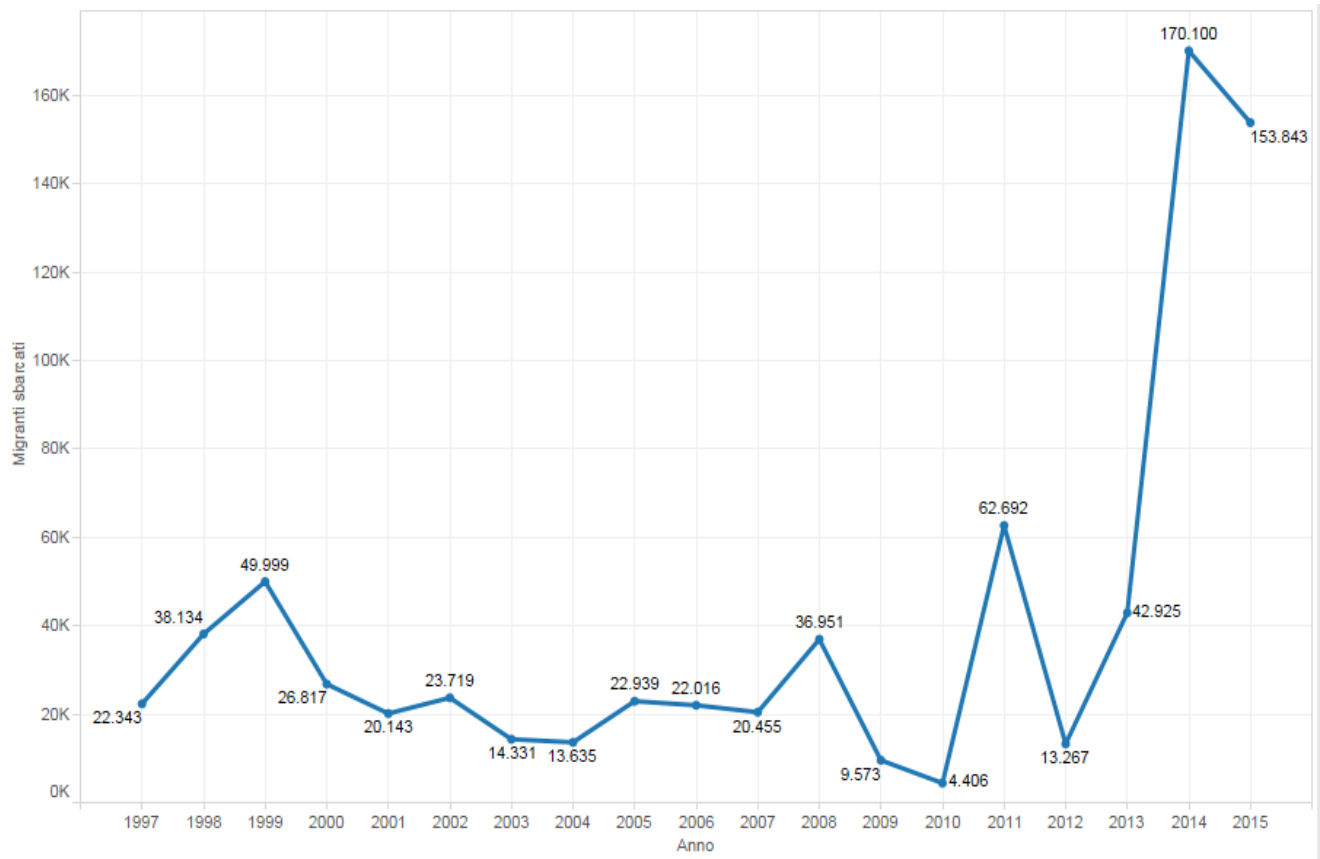


Figure 5

**Military Service** Throughout history, there have been a variety of attempts to integrate refugees into society. One of the methods previously used was to provide refugees integration through service in the military. This process is known as naturalization through the military. The service provides refugees with work, shelter, food, and in some situations, citizenship while the country benefits from more protection. The disadvantages make this option unattainable for Syrian refugees. The majority of refugees in Italy are coming from war-torn societies so very few are going to be inclined to join a military for an unknown country. There are also issues of loyalty. For safety reasons, Italy would be unlikely to enlist

migrants who do not have a sense of devotion or loyalty to their country.

Naturalization through military services would be a weak and unlikely option for Italy to implement.

**Work Visa** Receiving a work visa is another method countries have used to absorb refugees. Appropriate paperwork through government agencies or Italian companies would allow refugees to receive a work visa. The majority of the Syrian refugees, however, have lost any proof of identification while fleeing the country. If a refugee were to have the proper paperwork, language barriers and skepticism would make the process extremely difficult to implement.

**Citizenship** Acquiring citizenship is the most ideal way Italy can integrate their refugees into society. If a refugee is granted Italian citizenship, they have the benefit of being citizens of both Italy and the European Union. This will give them the right to travel freely over European Union borders and vote for European Parliament. Citizenship can be granted to refugees in two ways: marriage or living within the country for five years.

Marriage is an unlikely option for most Syrian refugees. There are culture, age, and language barriers. Culturally, Italians pride themselves on heritage and therefore are traditionally selective on whom they will marry. Age is also an issue. More than 50 percent of the Syrian refugees are under the age of 18 making marriage an unrealistic option (Mercy Corps, 2016). The language barrier is also a clear strain on the option to marry.

The second way to gain Italian citizenship is through residing in the country. The Italian government requires refugees to reside within the country for five years

in order to become an Italian citizen. This option is the most plausible for Syrian refugees, but there are extreme challenges concerning education, work opportunities, shelter, safety, etc. while living in the country to complete this option.

Many historical methods previously used to integrate refugees into society are unlikely to work with the unique scenario at hand. Becoming a citizen, however, is a method that holds potential for Syrian refugees to integrate successfully into Italy. Refugees can do this by remaining in Italy for five years. Residing in Italy for citizenship will be a crucial part to their overall integration into Europe, but refugees will also have to prepare themselves for integration. Developing an education and skill set to be successful in Europe is a process that should take place during the five-year time span refugees will have to wait for citizenship.

### **A Five-Year Educational Preparation Plan while Attaining Italian Citizenship**

Refugees will acquire necessary skills and techniques for successful integration as they wait to receive their Italian citizenship over the course of five years. An ideal five-year action plan based on successful integration methods and education will have the potential to change hopeless integration into a possible feat. In order to do this, refugee camps will have to implement a structured framework that will provide refugees with an education, cultural knowledge, and workforce opportunities.

The day-to-day environment of camps using a five-year integration framework will be similar to school systems. Refugee camps structuring their days around education will help create environments that will foster educational change and new beginnings. This structured framework will also transform dangerous, jail-

like refugee camps into thriving communities creating a safer environment for the existing Italian towns and cities surrounding the camps. The end goal of these five-year programs will be to ensure successful integration by preparing refugees with citizenship, education, and workforce connections.

### **Acquiring Citizenship, Education, and Connections through the Five-Year Plan**

The purposed five-year plan will be followed in order to integrate the Syrian refugee population into Italian society. The five-year plan is a framework that can be re-structured for various camps and geographic areas, but will always include refugees becoming a citizen, receiving an education, and creating connections. The benefits of the five-year plan are attainable for all persons seeking successful integration if they choose to follow the process from beginning to end. The plan is based on successful integration into Italian culture, not on temporary adaptation so it is an implausible option for refugees choosing to reside in refugee camps for short periods of time, or have intentions of traveling back to Syria.

#### **Children as the Focal Group**

All refugee camps can implement this five-year integration framework, and all refugees can actively use this program as they wait to inherit their Italian citizenship. The program, however, will specifically concentrate on aiding young Syrian refugees. The five-year framework will focus on young refugees because of their lack of workforce opportunity and economic mobility when arriving in Italy.

Children will also be focused on for the five-year program because they make up the majority of the Syrian refugee population. More than half of all Syrian refugees — roughly 2.5 million — seeking safety from outside countries are under

the age of 18 (Mercy Corps, 2016). Figure 6 is a visual graphic created by Mercy Corps representing the number of children apart of the Syrian refugee crisis. According to the U.N., the number of Syrian children coming into camps without families or friends is growing (Mercy Corps, 2016). Travel time to asylums is also creating a dramatic increase in the amount of children without a strong education.

## SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

### Children Caught in War



More than 50% of Syrian refugees are children who've lost everything.

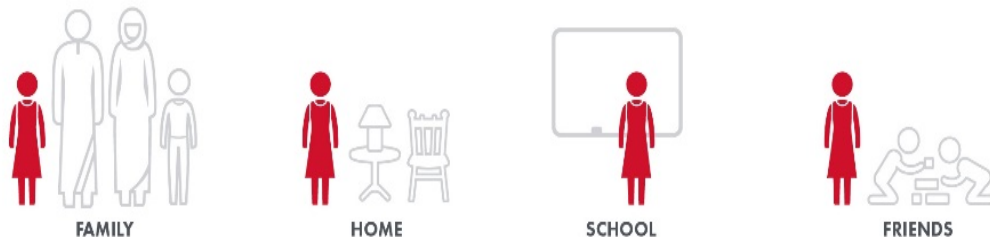


Figure 6

These children are entering Italy alone and are immediately placed within refugee camps. Due to age of majority laws, this age group has no choice but to live within the camps because they cannot work or integrate into society alone until they

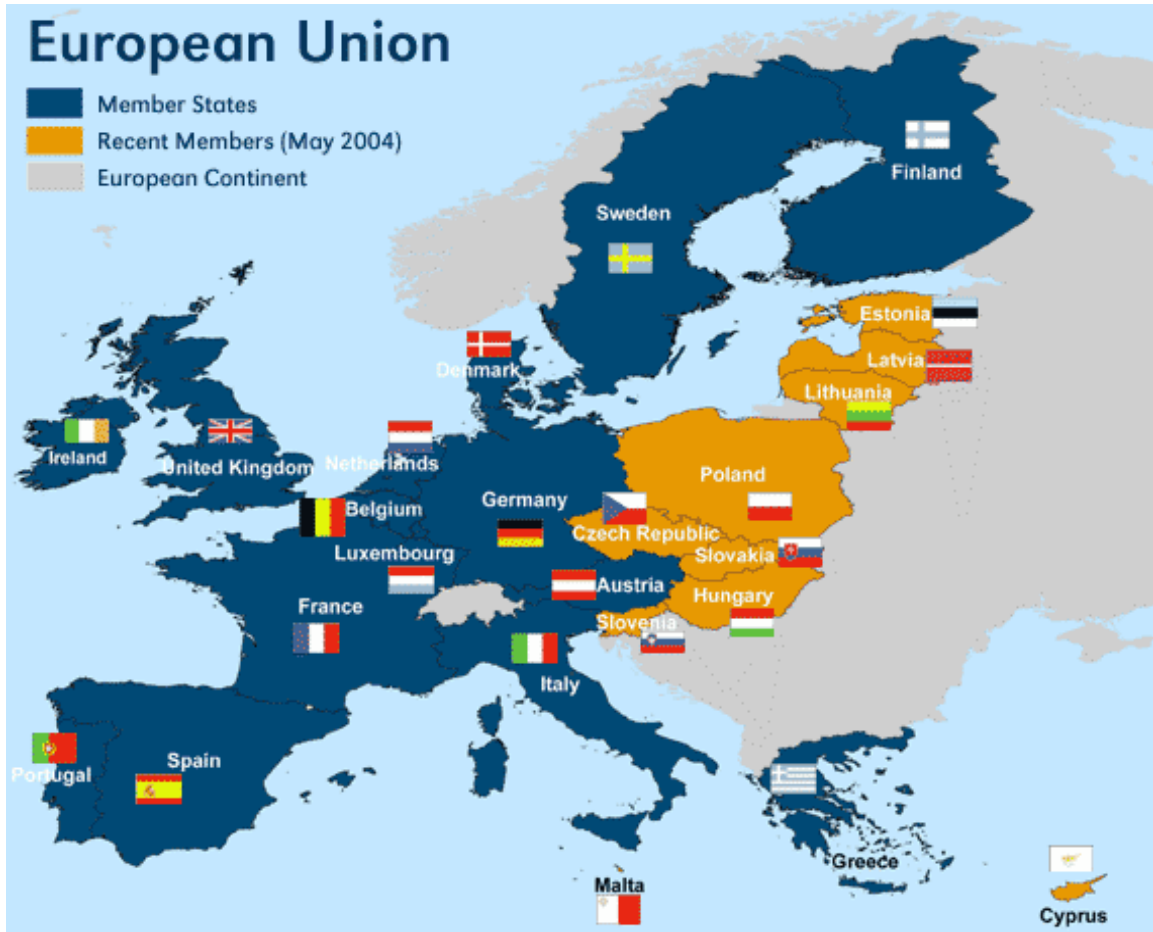


are older than the age of 18. The five-year plan can apply to others, but will specifically focus on this age group because of their vulnerability and majority.

**Receiving Citizenship** Becoming an Italian citizen is the first and ongoing action that should be taken in the five-year plan. The refugee camps Syrian refugees are residing in can help begin this process by redistributing paperwork, identities, and other necessities required for an Italian citizenship. Refugees must do their part by applying for citizenship and remaining in Italy for five consecutive years.

Citizenship will allow refugees access to civil rights within Italy. These rights will be extremely important for young refugees becoming Italian because they will include privileges like voting, compensation, and working opportunities. Rights from the European Union are also a benefit of becoming an Italian citizen. After World War II, the European Union set up a law system allowing all European Union citizens to share economical and political benefits from country-to-country. Figure 7 represents the countries included in the EU today (Travel Uaz, 2016). Being a citizen of Italy and the EU will allow young refugees greater opportunity and accessibility as they integrate into European society.

Figure 7



**Education** Receiving an education is the second and possibly the most crucial step for young refugees to integrate successfully into Italian society. This step in the five-year framework will be the most challenging as it takes time, energy, and commitment from both refugees and outside organizations. Young refugees should start their education as soon as possible after entering their refugee camp to begin learning the country's language, culture, and society formalities. The program will also be designed to teach refugees successful integration methods like staying in the workforce, money management skills, and establishing a supportive social network. Teachers and volunteers from organizations like RedCross and

MercyCorps will have the responsibility of teaching the education program. The program will ideally take the amount of time it takes a refugee to become a citizen, five years. If there is a child who needs a longer period of time to reach the desired education level or is unable to live alone, however, then the program will exceed the aspired time period. The intense five-year education program will transform refugee camps into environments that promote learning and success.

**Creating Connections** Creating connections to get into the workforce will be the final action young refugees will take before they try and enter Italian society. At the end of the program, refugees will have attained Italian citizenship and a suitable education for the workforce. This will allow them to interview and meet with outside parties for employment. Refugee camps can aid these young Syrians by bringing in government work programs, work scouts, and career organizations. This will help refugees immediately integrate into the workforce after the 5-year program ends as well as provide them with economic stability on their own. Italy can also benefit from refugee camps as potential employee centers. Refugee camps being treated as employment centers can help re-shape the country's workforce with diversity and young talent.

## **Conclusion**

The European Migrant Crisis is a pressing issue that is not abating. The migration has the opportunity to benefit European society, but only if every country is dedicated to supporting and absorbing incoming refugees. Italian society needs to implement a structured plan if they are going to successfully integrate the growing number of Syrian refugees coming into their borders. Historically, there have been

methods used like naturalization, green cards, and visas to accommodate refugees, but the drastically high numbers of misplaced people from the war-torn country of Syria has put Italy in a unique predicament. The country is running out of time and places to meld refugees safely into society.

A five-year program is only one answer to this growing crisis. This proposed framework holds a basic idea that could be the answer to problems found within refugee camps. With citizenship, young refugees can reap the benefits of both Italian and European Union citizenship. This will allow them to freely travel and partake in more work opportunities to help support themselves and their families. Education is the backbone to any Syrian refugee success. Young children entering refugee camps will have the opportunity to learn Italy's language and culture from a young age to ensure they can have a fighting chance when they eventually leave camp. Finally, the work connections refugees could receive from government agencies and outside organizations could change how Italian society views refugees.

Instead of being viewed as passive bodies residing in the country, Italy can start to view refugees as potential young, educated employees looking for a second beginning. With the proper education and framework, Syrian refugees and Italian society can benefit from one another. The process will pose challenges, take time, and require an extreme amount of dedication from both Italy and Syrian refugees, but successful integration is a feat that is possible.

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