

# European Union spends billions on war against refugees

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The European Union has responded to the tragedy facing refugees in the Mediterranean by investing billions to keep out desperate refugees and to send them back to poverty, civil war or almost certain death. This emerges from the report “The Human Cost of Fortress Europe” from Amnesty International.

The growing stream of refugees from Africa and the Middle East is a result of the wars and civil wars led and incited by the European powers and the US. Almost half of those trying to enter the EU irregularly flee from conflict or persecution in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia,” said John Dalhuisen from Amnesty International.

According to the UN Agency for Refugees, the number of displaced people has reached its highest level since the end of World War II. “Shockingly, the European Union’s response to this humanitarian crisis has been to add to it,” commented Dalhuisen.

According to the Amnesty report, the EU spent almost €2 billion between 2007 and 2013 on the construction of barriers, highly developed surveillance systems, and border controls in order to seal the borders. By contrast, only €700 million was allocated from the EU budget for asylum proceedings and the improvement of conditions confronted by asylum seekers.

Of the total EU resources for refugee policy, 46 percent was spent on securing borders, 16 percent to send refugees back and only 17 percent on the refugees themselves, for asylum proceedings, residential institutions and so on. But this does not result in their stay in the EU being secure, since most asylum seekers have their applications rejected. Twenty-one percent of the budget remains for the integration of those who ultimately end up staying.

Particularly in states close to the EU borders, the

imbalance between spending on preventing refugees from entering, and their residence and integration, is even more striking. In Spain, for example, only a few million euros are spent on refugees, while €300 million is spent on border security.

The joint border protection agency Frontex operates in military fashion to keep refugees out of Europe. While Frontex received almost €90 million in 2014, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which is supposed to provide assistance to asylum seekers, got just €15.6 million. Frontex also cooperates with non-EU states like Moldova and Ukraine. Frontex workers are based at the EU embassies in these countries.

Technology that can detect refugees before they step on European soil is becoming increasingly advanced. Since December 2013, only a few weeks after the Lampedusa disaster, the EU has been using Eurosur technology (European Border Surveillance System) to target refugees more effectively and keep them out.

Amnesty is also critical of the EU’s cooperation with so-called transit states like Turkey, Morocco and Libya to prevent refugees from even reaching Europe. An “outsourcing of migration control” is taking place there, the report notes.

“The EU is trying to establish a security zone around it. But here the rights of refugees are often trampled on. Whoever is stuck in a transit country like Turkey or Libya has no access to an orderly asylum procedure,” said the general secretary of Amnesty in Germany, Selmin Caliskan. “There, refugees are threatened with arrest, and in Libya even torture”, she said.

Refugees are also sent back from several EU states, such as Bulgaria and Greece, without having the chance of asylum proceedings or even to have the reasons for their refugee status reviewed. In Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in North Africa, the Guardia Civil shot rubber

bullets at refugees trying to swim from Morocco to Ceuta. Fourteen refugees died in the process and 23 who reached the beach were immediately sent back.

Amnesty rejects the lie that the majority of those seeking protection in Europe are economic migrants. Most come from countries where wars and civil wars are raging and the violation of human rights is a daily occurrence.

Amnesty also points out that only a tiny fraction of the globe's refugees come to Europe. Most remain near to their home country. Only 96,000 of the 2.8 million refugees from the Syrian civil war had sought protection in Europe by April 2014.

Many refugees are abused by European border guards or coastguards or held in refugee camps. In countries like Turkey or Ukraine, those sent back or captured at the border face being sent back to their country of origin without any consideration of whether their life is endangered there.

Among the most common routes to flee to Europe is the passage from Turkey over the Aegean Sea to Greece. Despite the relatively short distance, it is now one of the most dangerous due to the EU's intensified border controls. Between 2007 and 2013, the EU gave Greece €207 million for the protection of its borders, but only €22 million to improve the catastrophic situation for asylum seekers and refugees.

According to Amnesty, 210 people, including many children, have lost their lives since August 2012 while crossing the Aegean between Turkey and Greece. Most came from the warring regions in Afghanistan and Syria. Many were captured en route and sent back—an outrageous violation of human rights that the EU not only tolerates, but funds as well.

Amnesty documented this with reference to the fate of a number of individuals. In Istanbul, the organisation interviewed two sisters from the war-torn Syrian city Aleppo, who had allegedly attempted to reach Greece five times.

During an attempt to cross the border river Evros, they were repeatedly intercepted by Greek police officers and taken back in plastic boats. In one case, on November 11, 2013, they were held on the riverbank with around 200 refugees to be sent back to Turkey.

When some 150 refugees attempted to flee to a nearby church, the police surrounded it, preventing the clergymen from unlocking the church tower. The

refugees, including mothers with babies, were eventually transported back to the river in lorries and shipped back to Turkey. They were insulted, intimidated, had their money and valuables stolen and some were seriously abused, according to the reports of the two sisters.

Sixteen-year-old Rahmin from Afghanistan told Amnesty that he had not been allowed to enter Europe even though he had papers from the UN refugee agency. He had also tried on several occasions to reach the EU but had always been deported back to Turkey. On the Bulgarian-Turkish border, which is monitored by cameras, he was apprehended by armed police, beaten up with iron batons and thrown over the border into Turkey, “as if we were an old rag.”

In Turkey, Rahmin was held in the Edine deportation camp and threatened with deportation in spite of his UN document. As a punishment for an attempted escape he had to spend two weeks in a tiny cell without windows.

During a second attempt over the Aegean Sea, Rahmin was apprehended by the Greek coastguard only 10 metres from the island of Lesbos. After the refugees' boat sank, the coastguard brought them back close to the Turkish border and threw them out in an inflatable dinghy.

Rahmin told Amnesty that he was considering another attempt to flee. “I would stay in Turkey, but I have no rights here”, he said. “I can't legally work or go to school. I can't just continue working like this to survive. I feel stuck.” He works under appalling conditions of exploitation in a textile factory and is not allowed to go to school.



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