

Syrian Refugees

A profile of a highly-skilled population on the move



On 5 February 2016, *IOL* reported that Islamic State militants had slipped into Europe disguised as refugees, a day after security forces thwarted a potential IS attack in Berlin, according to Hans-Georg Maassen, the head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency.

He went on to say that the terrorist attacks in Paris last November had shown that IS was deliberately planting terrorists among the refugees flowing into Europe. “... *We have repeatedly seen that terrorists ... have slipped in camouflaged or disguised as refugees. This is a fact that the security agencies are facing,*” Maassen told ZDF television.

The fears of many Germans were reflected in the regional elections in March where Germany's main right-wing anti-immigrant party, Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD), won 15% of the vote in Baden-Württemberg, 12.5% in Rhineland-Palatinate and more than 24% in the east German state of Saxony-Anhalt – the strongest showing for a right-wing, populist party since the end of the second world war.

Fears of radical Islam infiltrating society are legitimate and proven. However, this should not be communities' prime consideration at this time. Rather, they should consider what the typical profile of a refugee is, and, given the estimated number of militants entering Europe,

whether the threat of one militant outweighs the opportunity of reaching out to those with legitimate needs.

THE PROFILE

In an analysis conducted by UNHCR border protection teams in various locations in Greece, interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees who arrived in the country between April and September 2015. Although the UNHCR survey is not representative of the whole Syrian refugee population, it does provide a good overall picture of what an average refugee could look like upon entering Europe.

The research showed the following: of every group of **1,000 refugees** actually entering Europe, the group would consist of the following:

SKILLS AND EDUCATION

- 0 IS fighters (at the most, only every third group of 1,000 refugees would contain one IS fighter - see section below*)
- 860 with secondary or university level education
- 160 students
- 90 merchants
- 80 employed in the private sector
- 70 technical professionals – carpenters, electricians, plumbers
- 50 engineers, architects
- 50 teachers
- 40 doctors and pharmacists
- 40 skilled labourers
- 40 housewives

Additional professions cited by respondents included lawyers, judges, cooks, drivers, professors, academics, hairdressers, beauticians and IT specialists.

The UNHCR commented as follows: *“Those Syrians interviewed reported a very high level of education. Overall, the profile (of the refugees) is of a highly-skilled population on the move.”*

AGE AND STATUS

690 18 – 35 years old
90 12 – 17 years old
20 over 60
190 women
810 men
450 married
500 single

200 had been separated from family members and did not know where their families were
50 were victims of torture

RELIGION

850 Sunni Muslims
60 Christian
90 either atheist or belong to different faiths

THE FUTURE

The influx of youth will greatly benefit a European community that is growing older. Currently, nearly one out of every five people in Europe is 65 years or older. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of young people could be the salvation of Europe, from a generational point of view. On the flip-side, the exodus of young people could prove disastrous for countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in the years to come.

The influx of skilled people could also greatly benefit the economy of Europe over the next 10 to 16 years, since research shows that, on average, a refugee can expect to remain a refugee for 17 years. For example, the Refugee Council of Australia has demonstrated that 65% of current enterprises involve refugees from non-English speaking backgrounds. A good illustration of the entrepreneurial character that a refugee arrival brings was shown in the 2000 *Business Review Weekly's* annual “Rich 200” list: it revealed that five of Australia’s eight billionaires were people whose parents migrated to this country as refugees. On the flip-side, the exodus of skilled people will be disastrous for the Middle East.

THE MESSAGE

Two messages can be proclaimed using the exact same statistics above.

One message communicates the following:



“There is some really good news, folks. We will be welcoming 1,000 people to our town this week and this could truly benefit our community. These are smart, educated people; most are young and energetic, who will greatly contribute to the economy of our town. We know there is a risk of bad elements among them, but there are far more positives than negatives. We are willing to take that risk. There will be 40 medical doctors and pharmacists among them who can assist us with our medical needs. There will be at least 50 teachers to assist our children, and 50 architects and engineers to contribute to

the expansion of our town. There will be 70 carpenters and electricians and 40 skilled labourers. We will experience the joy of being exposed to new cultures, and especially the opportunity of sharing ours with them. There will be 60 Christians in their midst, and they can assist us in reaching the 850 Muslims with hope and peace, which many are searching for after

having had to leave their own country due to persecution from their own people. We will meet next week to discuss how we can best integrate them into society.”

The second message communicates the following:



“We have some really bad news, folks. We will be invaded by 1,000 Arabs this week and there could be some terrorists among them. These are smart people and shouldn’t be underestimated. Yes, there will be some great opportunities, but we are not willing to take that risk. As far as we know, nearly all of them are Muslim and this will impact the culture of our town completely. There are more than 50 teachers in their midst and no doubt they will influence our children. We can safely assume that there are some criminal elements among them as well and thus we need to be alert. Most of them are young men of a military age and though some are skilled, they come from violent areas and will soon start demanding their rights. We will have a march next week to protest their proposed arrival.”

At INcontext, we choose to communicate the first message. There are enough voices communicating the second message.

***THE FIGHTERS**

According to intelligence reports, IS is currently training and deploying 400 fighters to Europe. However, what should be of greater concern from a European perspective are the European citizens traveling to Syria and Iraq to be trained as IS fighters and returning to Europe, rather than those from the Middle East who might enter Europe camouflaged as refugees. MSN reports that the numbers of young European Muslims who have traveled to Syria to fight alongside IS is staggering. Recent intelligence estimates peg the number at more than 5,000, with about 470 coming from Belgium alone. While that is the largest number per capita of any country in the European Union, France is the leader in raw numbers, with 1,700 travelers to Syria. The ongoing investigations into the Brussels bombings have thus far revealed that the vast majority of the culprits are European citizens, not refugees, as was the case with the Paris attack suspects.

A possible 400 refugees trained as IS fighters pales in comparison with the number of Europeans being trained and then returning.

The threat is real and cannot be underestimated. The world has already seen what a handful of terrorists can do in Paris and Brussels. But, looking at the composition of the more than 1,2 million refugees that entered Europe during 2015, there is a more positive picture. There are potentially 120 doctors for every terrorist and at least 150 engineers for every fighter.

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