

Media advice, Mercy Corps, December 2016

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1. Has the \$3 billion EU/Turkey deal signed in November to stem the flow of refugees impacted that flow? Have numbers decreased? (*I can also check UNHCR for these figures*)
Please do check with UNHCR. It's still too early to be clear about the impact of the deal so far, but the season and associated bad weather are currently the main factors deterring refugees, and even this seems not to be making a significant impact, at the moment is the dangerous sea weather.
However, not significantly.

2. Why are people still getting on those boats? Why are they still hiring smugglers?
A few months ago, it was hard to imagine the situation in Syria could get any worse. However, it has.
The increased number and intensity of airstrikes on Syria in the last three months have caused a huge deterioration in life in the state, driving larger and larger numbers of people from their homes to escape both violence, and hunger, deteriorated hugely over the last 3 months. People are being driven from their homes in larger and larger numbers by hunger and violence.

Mercy Corps is continuing to do everything it can to reach these people, but even the access of aid organisations has deteriorated due to the increase in bombing airstrikes. People are more desperate now than ever. The recent increase in bombing in Syria has eclipsed the final hope people may have had that they might one day lead a normal life in Syria.

After almost five years of devastating conflict, people need hope again.

When they wake up each day they need the security of knowing that they can feed their families, keep them healthy and most importantly safe. Many children have never been to school, and most have not attended since the war began. Syria was a country with near-universal education and with a highly educated population. Syrian parents value education enormously and understand that their children's futures will be even harder without it.

Many people understand the risks they are taking when they pay smugglers to cross the sea, but many also see-regard the risk of dying while trying a better option than the risk of staying and losing their future.

3. Are migrants rights being abused by Turkish authorities?

The Turkish government has done a huge amount to ensure that the 2 million Syrian refugees that have so far registered with it in the 4.5 years since the war in Syria began, can be accommodated and protected in Turkey.

Most notably, they introduced a system that allows Syrians to visit the hospital and doctor free of charge, and more recently helped them access medicine by introducing the same low cost prescription charge available to Turkish citizens.

As with any state system that has undergone a 2.7% such an increase in demand within such an extremely short period, it needs time and improvements to meet people's needs deliver. However, the government have accepted that they-it alone cannot manage to support such a large workload alone, and have also been open to large numbers of international organisations such as Mercy Corps, which are helping to fill the gaps as we do with our community centre in Gaziantep and winterization & hygiene program in Izmir.

While provision is being made for Syrian citizens in Turkey, there are significant shortfalls. And the situation for non-Syrian migrants and refugees in Europe and Turkey is less well understood. We are currently seeing large numbers of refugees fleeing from Afghanistan as the country becomes increasingly destabilized and more of its citizens fall victim to the threat of armed violence and hunger. It is important for the international community to be aware of the situation for refugees from countries similarly affected by conflict and instability in the region and be prepared to ensure their rights are protected.

4. Has the deal with the EU and subsequent Turkish action against the smugglers actually reduced the smuggling? Has this action increased the cost to refugees? The danger?

Firstly, deals take time to implement, so it is unlikely that any budget support offered to the Turkish government will have an immediate impact. Some measures being spoken about by the Turkish government include: introducing housing support for vulnerable families and permission to work in some sectors such as health and medicine. Even if such measures are approved, they will not take effect immediately. They will need to build more schools and medical facilities for example.

But other measures which have been discussed include arrest and detention of Syrian refugees. Though it is understandable that all parties to this deal wish to both act and be seen to act, this proposal is likely to simply drive more vulnerable people to act outside the law, and to deliberately 'disappear'. This will, of course, actively harm the international community's chances to reach and help those who need it most.

The money will also help organisations - including Mercy Corps - reach more people and alleviate the suffering of moreover 3000 families in the Aegean region over the winter months and into the new year which may help to encourage people not to risk their lives on a dangerous and illegal sea crossing. deter these people.

But the problems cannot be solved by money alone. Desperation and hope are what drive people to make this voyage. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan alone cannot support the four 4 million refugees that have already fled the conflict in Syria and the million or so more that will likely flee next year.

Other countries must provide A-a fast, efficient, asylum application process must be provided to these people by other countries that ensures that while these people await asylum confirmation they are protected and able to survive. If these measures are not put in place, people will continue to risk their lives making the sea crossing.