

World Refugee Day: 100 NGOs and thousands of citizens petition European leaders to Act Now to help Syria's refugees

Brussels, 20 June 2014. As [UNHCR reveals](#) that, in the space of 5 years, Syria has gone from being the world's second largest refugee-hosting country to the country producing the second largest amount of refugees, [100 NGOs](#), Members of the European Parliament and [20,000 citizens](#) submit their petition for European leaders to ensure access to protection in Europe for the refugees fleeing the Syrian war. Anne Kemppainen, representative of the Office of the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, [has received](#) today the [#HelpSyriasRefugees petition](#) calling on Europe to **give refugees a safe way into Europe, reunite families** torn apart by the crisis and **protect the refugees arriving at Europe's borders**.

"In times of war, keeping your family together and safe, is your first priority. People living in Europe who have Syrian family members are trying hard to get their loved ones to join them here but complex visa and administrative requirements often make it impossible for them to be reunited without taking high risks. We, NGO and citizens across Europe, are asking our political leaders to give more refugees from Syria the opportunity to find safety here without having to put themselves in the hands of smugglers or risking their lives on the journey", said Michael Diedring, ECRE Secretary General.

"I am honoured to receive this petition which has succeeded in mobilising European public opinion. This event is a very timely initiative to give some concrete policy recommendations to European decision makers ahead of next week's European Council meeting. The EU remains the leading humanitarian actor in Syria and the neighbouring countries and the track record is improving also regarding resettlement", said Anne Kemppainen, representative of the Office of the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy.

Almost 3 million people are on the run from the war in Syria. In Lebanon alone, a country of 4 million inhabitants, there are more than a million refugees from Syria. However, only 3% (around 98,000 people) of the people who have fled the war in Syria have sought protection in the EU since the beginning of the conflict.

"We ask the countries which are receiving persons fleeing the war in Syria to be welcoming and understanding, and while doing this, being active in rebuilding peace in Syria", said Monseigneur Antoine Audo, Bishop of Aleppo and President of Caritas Syria, at the [conference](#) closing the #HelpSyriasRefugees campaign.

Last week, Germany agreed to resettle 10,000 more refugees from Syria, thereby bringing Germany's commitment to resettle people fleeing Syria to 20,000 refugees. Other EU Member States together have offered to resettle around 5,000 refugees from Syria. For the years 2015-2016, UNHCR considers that 100,000 refugees will need to find a safe haven through resettlement or other forms of admission.

Notes to the Editor

The [Europe Act Now - #HelpSyriasRefugees](#) campaign is coordinated by the [European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#) (ECRE). ECRE is a pan-European alliance of NGOs protecting and advancing the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons, including Caritas Europa.

In [a joint statement](#), Caritas Europa and Mediterranean Caritas called for safe and open channels of legal entry to the EU.

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