

International Asylum Seeker/Refugee Policy Issues

[First Syrian refugees arrive in Toronto](#)

AFP, *iafrica.com*, 11 December 2015

A plane carrying 163 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada on 11 December, kicking off a drive to take in thousands from the war-torn country. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was at Toronto's airport to greet them. The government hopes to bring in 10 000 Syrian refugees by the end of the year. The first group arrived aboard a troop transport plane that set out from Beirut and made a stopover in Germany. The new Liberal government campaigned on a pledge to resettle 25 000 Syrians this year. But it backpedaled last month, citing logistical issues and following criticism that Ottawa had been moving too fast despite security concerns heightened by the terror attacks in Paris. Immigration Minister John McCallum has said he remains hopeful the government can bring in 10,000 refugees by December 31. A further 15,000 are expected to arrive by the end of February. Since the start of 2014, Canada has welcomed 3500 Syrian refugees.

[Refugee crisis: EU summit exposes impotence and unfulfilled pledges](#)

Ian Traynor, *The Guardian*, 17 December 2015

The 28 European leaders met at the EPP summit on 17 December to discuss a European Border and Coast Guard proposal, the situation in Turkey, and the upcoming referendum in the UK. Leaders discussed incendiary proposals tabled by the European commission to create an EU border and coastguard, empowered to overrule national governments when the EU's external frontiers are deemed to be inadequately secured. Although the proposal won strong support from the German and French leaders, in many parts of the EU it was viewed as an assault on national sovereignty. The eastern European states most strongly opposed to taking in refugees were threatened with cuts to the large cash handouts they receive from the EU budget. Apart from Greece, seven other government leaders from Scandinavia, Benelux, Austria are net contributors to the EU budget and are also the biggest recipients of refugees. Before the EPP summit Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, also arranged a mini-summit or 'coalition of the willing' with these countries as well as Turkey since these are the governments who are willing to share refugees 'voluntarily', rather than on the mandatory basis being proposed by the European commission. A confidential paper on migration presented to the EPP summit by Luxembourg, which is currently in the EU's six-month rotating chair, revealed a long list of unredeemed pledges by national governments and false promises. The leaders have decided to continue monitoring the work that is being done and report back on progress before the February meeting of the European Council.

[UNHCR Repatriates Nearly 6,000 Somali Refugees From Kenya](#)

Admin, *Somalia Focus*, 18 December 2015

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) a total of '5,853 Somali refugees returned home since December 8, 2014, when UNHCR started supporting voluntary return of Somali refugees in Kenya' as Kenya claims that the refugee situation continues to pose security threats to Nairobi and the region apart from the humanitarian crisis. The refugees are mostly returning to Kismayu and Baidoa in southern Somalia. The repatriation is being done through a framework agreed upon in a tripartite agreement among Kenya, Somalia and the UNHCR. The estimated number of Somali refugees in the country is over 500,000. Dadaab refugee camp, currently home to some 350,000 people, is the largest settlement in the world. For more than 20 years, it has been home to generations of Somalis who have fled a country embroiled in conflict.

[Number of people forced to flee war, violence to hit record in 2015: UN](#)

AFP, *Timeslive*, 18 December 2015

According to a report published by the UN refugee agency the amount of refugees, asylum seekers or displaced people in 2015 was a 'record for global forced displacement' as the figure 'has far surpassed 60 million'. This means that one in every 122 people on the planet is today someone who has been forced to flee their home. Antonio Guterres, UN refugee chief, said that 'Forced displacement is now profoundly affecting our times [...] Never has there been a greater need for tolerance, compassion and solidarity with people who have lost everything.' The UNHCR report indicates that during the first six months of 2015, at least five million people were newly displaced, with 4.2 million of them remaining inside their country and 839,000 crossing borders -- the equivalent of 4,600 people becoming refugees every single day. The main contributor is the ruthless conflict in Syria, which by June 2015 had created 4.2 million refugees. Without this factor, the global increase in refugee numbers from 2011 to mid-2015 would have been just five percent. Global asylum applications shot up 78 percent compared to the first half of 2015 to nearly a million. Germany was the world's biggest recipient of asylum claims, clocking 159,000 during the six months leading to June -- close to the total for all of 2014. Russia came in second place in terms of asylum applications, receiving 100,000 in the first half of 2015, mainly from people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. The overall number of internally displaced people (IDPs), subtracting those who have returned home, swelled by two million over the six month period to about 34 million, the report said. War-ravaged Yemen alone saw 933,500 new IDPs in the first half of the year, while the war in Ukraine displaced 559,000 internally, and the Democratic Republic of Congo counted 558,000 new internally displaced. UNHCR meanwhile warned the global IDP numbers were likely higher, since the report only covers internally displaced people under UNHCR protection, and not those cared for at a national level.

[Hundreds of African migrants storm Spanish border post](#)

AFP, *Timeslive*, 25 December 2015

Over a hundred of African migrants stormed a border fence in the north of Ceuta near the city Benzu which lies between Morocco and the Spanish territory. Since some migrants got injured from jumping over the barbed wire-topped border fence or from swimming across to the Spanish city, several Red Cross volunteers managed to treat 185 injured migrants. Twelve of them needed to be taken to hospital to treat cuts requiring stitches, fractured bones, hypothermia or symptoms of drowning. Red Cross volunteers also gave clothes and shoes to the migrants. Along with Melilla to the east, Ceuta is one of two Spanish territories on the northern coast of Morocco that together form the European Union's only land borders with Africa. Spain fortified fences in the two territories last year in response to a rise in the number of migrants trying to jump over the barriers from neighbouring Morocco. Last year after 15 migrants drowned in the Mediterranean after dozens tried to enter Ceuta by swimming from a nearby beach. Human rights groups and migrants said the Spanish police tried to keep them from crossing into Spanish territory by firing rubber bullets and spraying them with tear gas. The Spanish government has since said that its guards are now banned from using bullets to repel migrants.

[Burundi protest could delay a return to peace talks](#)

Fred Oluoch & Havyarimana Moses, *The EastAfrican*, 2 January 2016

In December the 54-member African Union said it would send a 5 000-strong force to halt violence that has sparked fears Burundi is sliding back towards civil war, and has pledged to send troops despite Burundi's fierce opposition. The deployment of peacekeeping troops were also a major discussing point in the round of talks hosted by the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. These talks or also called intra-Burundi dialogue was attended by rival Burundian factions – a total of 14 groups including the ruling party, opposition parties and civil society. The talks ended in a stalemate, however, as both sides issued conditions to be met before the talks — scheduled for Arusha in Tanzania — resume. This comes as the AU threatens sanctions against the rival groups who fail to attend the peace talks, even as the continental body puts pressure on the government to allow the deployment of the peacekeepers. The Chair of the AU Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, had warned of sanctions against those who jeopardise the upcoming dialogue on January 6 by refusing to respond to the invitation of the mediator, if violence continues and the Intra-Burundi Dialogue stalls.

Regional Displacement Issues

[State to begin border operation to flush out Al Shabaab](#)

Adow Jubat, *StandardDigital*, 28 December 2015

According to the Somali government Al Shabaab is planning to carry out major terror attacks in the country. The militants have carried out at least three attacks during the festive season, killing at least eight people including four police officers. Mandera County commissioner Fredrick Shisia regretted that the militants have renewed terror attacks in the border county, having been contained for the last six months following a major shake-up of top security officials in the north-eastern region. In

response to the attacks the government is planning to carry out a security operation to flush out Somali-based insurgents. The hotspots earmarked for the operation are Fino, Omar Jillo, Arabia, Lafey and Dabacity, which are all frequent attack zones as they border Somalia. The security operation will be conducted by a combined team of the military and police officers deployed to the region to track the attackers to their hideouts at the border.

[Al-Shabaab militants, soldiers die in S. Somalia gun battle](#)

Xinhuanet, 28 December 2015

On 28 December a heavy gun battle outside Qoyolay town located in lower Shabelle region of southern Somalia caused the death of five soldiers and nine Al-Shabaab militants. Officials said the Al-Qaida linked militants attempted to capture the town guarded by Somalia national and African Union troops when the fighting ensued. Spokesman of Lower Shabelle region Mohammed Shino told Xinhua that attempts by Al-Shabaab militants to capture Qoyolay town failed to materialize thanks to stiff resistance from Somalia government and African Union troops. Unconfirmed reports had also pointed at possible death of civilians during the night-long gun battle. African Union and Somalia government forces freed Qoyolay town from Al-Shabaab in March 2014.

[Armed group kidnap 46, assassinates 16 civilians](#)

Vanguard, 30 December 2015

Congolese official and civil society groups announced in Beni that sixteen civilians had been assassinated by an armed group in eastern Congo. After the disappearance of 46 more people on Saturday 26 December, the bodies were found in the town Buleusa on 29 and 30 December. Local official Joy Bokele, attributed the killings to the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Hutu rebel group from neighbouring Rwanda that opposes Tutsi influence in eastern Congo. They are waging a terror campaign kidnapping civilians and burning down entire villages. Bokele said the FDLR was trying to scare off the Union of Patriots for the Defence of Innocents (UPDI), a community militia defending territory against the Rwandan rebel group. He added that the FDLR was carrying out killings in villages where many UPDI members came from, the official added. Bokele said the army was planning to send soldiers to the area. Dozens of armed groups have remained active in eastern Congo since the 1996-2003 Congo wars, sparked by more than 1 million Rwandans flooding into the region after the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

[Clashes between rebels and army in Congo leave eight dead](#)

News24, 2 January 2016

According to an army spokesperson clashes between rebels and the Congolese military in the city of Bunyakiri on 2 January, led to at least eight deaths. Seven Mai Mai militants and one civilian are reported to have died. The Mai Mai armed group, made up of between 5 000 and 7 000 predominantly Hutu fighters, was formed two decades ago to defend local territory against other armed groups allied with neighbouring Rwanda.

South Africa

[UNHCR 'failed' xeno violence victims](#)

Sandiso Phaliso, *IOL News*, 14 December 2015

The xenophobic attacks in Grahamstown three months ago left around 300 foreign nationals displaced. The foreign nationals are now accusing the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for failing to provide them with adequate assistance. Unemployed People's Movement (UPM) member Ayanda Kota said the UNHCR had offered displaced people three vouchers – R1 000 for rent in December, R500 for groceries and R300 for toiletries. However, according to him only the R500 food voucher had been distributed, together with deodorant, toothpaste and sanitary materials. UNHCR spokesperson Tina Ghelli said the organisation had provided assistance through the Cape Town Refugee Centre (CTRC). She said CTRC distributed the food vouchers, and also deposited R1,000 into bank accounts meant for rent. Ghelli promised that another deposit of R1,000 for rent shall be made before the end of December 2015.

[Refugees struggle to renew permits](#)

Ntando Makhubu, *IOL News*, 16 December 2015

According to the Department of Home Affairs, it issued 75,000 permits to foreign immigrants in 2015. Of these 4,136 were permanent permits and 69,000 temporary. The categories of those granted permanent status were relatives (2,613), 1,228 received work permits, 164 were refugees, 41 wanted to do business and 90 were retired people. Five categories of permanent permits were given and 10 types of temporary ones had been approved. The top 10 countries that received 77% of permanent permits were Zimbabwe, India, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, the UK, Lesotho, Pakistan, Germany and Zambia. South Africa closely followed international criteria for eligibility for temporary or permanent residence permits. Government policies encouraging international students to migrate to study in the country were likely to change to a more stringent one in the near future. Statistician-General Pali Lehohla says that South Africa closely followed international criteria for eligibility for temporary or permanent residence permits, however, government policies encouraging international students to migrate to study in the country were likely to change to a more stringent one in the near future.

[Home Affairs incompetence causes refugees to lose jobs, money and bank accounts](#)

Tariro Washinyira, *GroundUp*, 18 December 2015

The Department of Home Affairs office in Cape Town has been accused of turning away refugees since September 2015 without assisting them because the department has lost their files. Some refugees have consequently lost their jobs and had their bank accounts frozen. Journalists from GroundUp newspaper visited the Department of Home Affairs and interviewed several people who confirmed

the harsh conditions and their difficulties in getting their permits renewed. According to Bernard Toyambi, the director of PASSOP, an NGO that advocates the rights of refugees and which has been observing the situation at Home Affairs 'The chaos is in the refugee status department' as the 'ID, passport and asylum permit departments are doing well'. Toyambi urges the problem of delayed renewals of refugee statuses needs to be investigated. He also stated that PASSOP is not 'happy refugees are turned away because they are not able to produce the copies of their previous permit. Refugees move around too much and it is hard for them to keep records. Home Affairs should be able to assist them without producing their original papers'. GroundUp sent Home Affairs a request to comment on 15 December. The Department has acknowledged receipt of the query, but at time of publication it had not responded.

[KZN farmer living in fear as refugees 'turn on him'](#)

Amanda Khoza, *News24*, 18 December 2015

The owners of Hope Farm in Killarney Valley, KwaZulu-Natal, who took in 139 foreign nationals who had fled their respective homes following a spate of xenophobic attacks earlier this year, were threatened by some of these foreigners on their farm. The situation took a turn for the worse when the refugees were informed that each family must make individual applications to the United Nations for relocation. Fifty Five members accepted the terms, but the remaining 85 refused saying they wanted to be moved as a group. Since then, tensions between the two sides have risen. According to Mr Wartnaby, the owner of the farm, the bigger group became militant and refused to do anything on the farm, while the other group continued to cooperate with him. The bigger group accused Mr. Wartnaby of being a government agent, threatened to kill him and torched the main tent of where the refugees were staying. Lawyers from Access to Justice say the Social Development Department, SAPS and the SA Council of Churches are now attempting to bring about resolution.

[Over 1,000 arrested in KZN during festive season crackdown](#)

News24, *SABC*, 29 December 2015

Police spokesperson Major Thulani Zwane said 1,061 people had been arrested during Operation Fiel. The operation was conducted between December 21 and December 27. Crimes included murder, robbery, dealing in liquor, sexual offences, assaults, possession of unlicensed firearms, possession of drugs, stock theft, house-breakings, shoplifting, drunken driving and attempted murder. KwaZulu-Natal ommissioner, Lieutenant General Mmamonye Ngobeni, applauded police for their hard work and urged members of the community to continue supporting police by informing them about illegal activities.