



26 February 2014 - What do YOU think would happen if the United Kingdom would have to accept up to 12,5 million refugees because of a civil war in a neighbouring country?

While this may be almost unthinkable to us, it is reality for a number of refugee host countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, who have accepted refugees -speaking in percentages – between 19.3-20.7% of their populations.

This is the equivalent to the UK receiving roughly 12,7 million refugees, Germany 16 million and France 13 million.

Okay, one might think , we haven't exactly taken in that many but industrialized countries are still receiving the largest parts of the world's refugees and struggle under the burden this humanitarian action brings along, right?

Wrong.

80% of the world's 11 million registered refugees have sought refuge in the developing world, mostly in border countries. This applies to the Syrian refugees as well. Over 2.4 million Syrian refugees have found their way to neighbouring countries, and only some 73,000 have sought protection in Europe.

When the Syrian refugees first crossed into neighbouring countries, many were welcomed and benefited from extraordinary acts of generosity. In Jordan and Lebanon, early refugees lived with friends, relatives and host families. However, as war kept going on and the number of refugees increasing, the welcome has started to wear thin in some places and hostility towards refugees has grown in the region.

The impact on many communities across the region is overwhelming. Schools have moved to double-shifts to accommodate Syrian children. Hospital beds are filled by Syrian patients. Rents have risen and wages have fallen as a result of the competition for housing and jobs. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon.

There is also fear of the conflict spilling over to neighbouring countries, not least Lebanon, where recent bomb attacks have been linked to the conflict.

By keeping the borders open and providing access to safety, the neighbouring countries have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

The open borders and the proximity of Jordan and Lebanon is of course one reason for the great number of refugees. Europe has not exactly chosen the same path.

According to Markku Aikomus, chief of external relations at the UNHCR Swedish headquarters, it was often difficult to reach Europe as it was – and now it is virtually impossible for Syrian refugees to enter Europe legally. This is illustrated very well by the British newspaper The Guardian through their [interactive map](#) .

“Therefore, many see using human traffickers as the only available option to save their lives. Many have paid their life savings to be taken to safety, often under very dangerous conditions. Many have lost their lives in tragic boat accidents while trying to cross the Mediterranean in unseaworthy and overcrowded boats. UNHCR advocates for providing alternatives through resettlement and humanitarian admission, or through other forms of more flexible admission to Europe through work-, student- or humanitarian visas”, Mr Aikomus says.