

d·i·e

Deutsches Institut für
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development
Institute

A five-point plan for dealing with the refugee crisis: there are no small solutions to big problems

By Dirk Messner,
*German Development Institute /
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)*

The Current Column

of 11 September 2015

A five-point plan for dealing with the refugee crisis: there are no small solutions to big problems

Bonn, 11 September 2015. Europe and Germany cannot be an island of contentment, because cross-border crises do not simply disappear by building walls, looking away and failing to act. This is the lesson to be learned from 2015: crises on the financial markets and in Greece, Ebola, Charlie Hebdo and Islamic terror at the heart of Europe, global data espionage penetrating as far as the Federal Chancellery, the suffering and misery of the refugees. 2015 is not a year of exceptional crisis, to be followed by calmer circumstances. Comprehensive globalisation means that we need to learn to come to terms with its boomerang effects if prosperity, democracy and security are to have a future.

The refugee crisis requires a comprehensive approach, a five-point plan in order to slow down escalation, save human lives and our concept of humanism. None of the initiatives required is simple; all of them require perseverance, significant application of resources and bold political reforms.

Firstly, Europe, in co-operation with the USA and working together with Russia, Iran, Saudi-Arabia, Egypt and Tunisia, should push for a process of long-term stabilisation and reform of the MENA region. Just as Europe was rebuilt after the Second World War, the Near and Middle East needs to "reinvent" itself. There are no quick solutions which is why work needs to begin promptly. Pragmatic visionaries are called for, like the recently deceased Egon Bahr, who despite - or due to - the situations in Syria, Iraq, Libya or Yemen develop a multilateral process in order to consistently address the problems of failing states, war, Islamic terror and refugees.

Secondly the UN, EU, G7 and G20 have to find fair and humanitarian solutions for 60 million refugees worldwide. It is shameful enough that we Europeans only address this problem after a small portion of these uprooted people head for Europe. Countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey or Pakistan, Uganda, Chad are dealing with far vaster numbers of refugees (per inhabitant) than in Europe, and require large-scale support. How can multilaterally-protected security zones be created for refugees? How can refugee camps be established that avoid the loss of hope and prospects - and with them the endless cycle of apathy and violence? How can the burden be shared fairly with regard to future climate refugees, e.g. from the Pacific island states and African countries threatened by drought?

Thirdly, here in Germany and Europe we need to do our homework to enable the humane reception and integration of refugees. This concerns refugee policy and migration policy in the broader sense, incorporating financial, institutional, labour market, social and education policy challenges, but above all moral challenges. Politics and civil society are called upon to ensure that the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War does not culminate in the humanitarian bankruptcy of Europe. What form can circularly migration take in order to promote the employment of people in Germany and their subsequent reintegration in their stabilised home countries? What should European co-operation look like if the popularity of a Europe as conceived by Viktor Orbán is to be minimised? How can refugees of war be comprehensively protected and humane paths established for people hoping for a better economic future in Germany and Europe?

Fourthly, the causes of flight need to be tackled. Refugees come from war zones and failed states, countries with desolate economic prospects or dictatorships in which human rights are infringed. None of these problems can be resolved quickly, yet development policy, clever diplomacy and security policy and provide prospects for future development and improved living conditions. This requires money, time and creativity. German and European Africa policy needs to be realigned and extended. Europe needs to significantly increase its activities in the Balkan states. Effective climate policy is preventive refugee policy.

Fifthly, there is a need for education policy. The coming generations need to learn how to live in an open, more heterogeneous migration society. This includes knowledge of Islam, similarly the handling of unavoidable conflicts in social stress situations, tolerance and the obligation of all citizens to observe democracy and human rights. In addition, education policy must also prepare people to acknowledge that a high degree of global co-operation is an essential prerequisite for peace and prosperity in a closely-linked world. At the end of the 18th century, in the Age of Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant was already warning that it is not enough to be citizens of a nation, people need to be citizens of the world. This is a central task for the international community in order to not sink into a mire of uncontrollable conflicts and crises.