

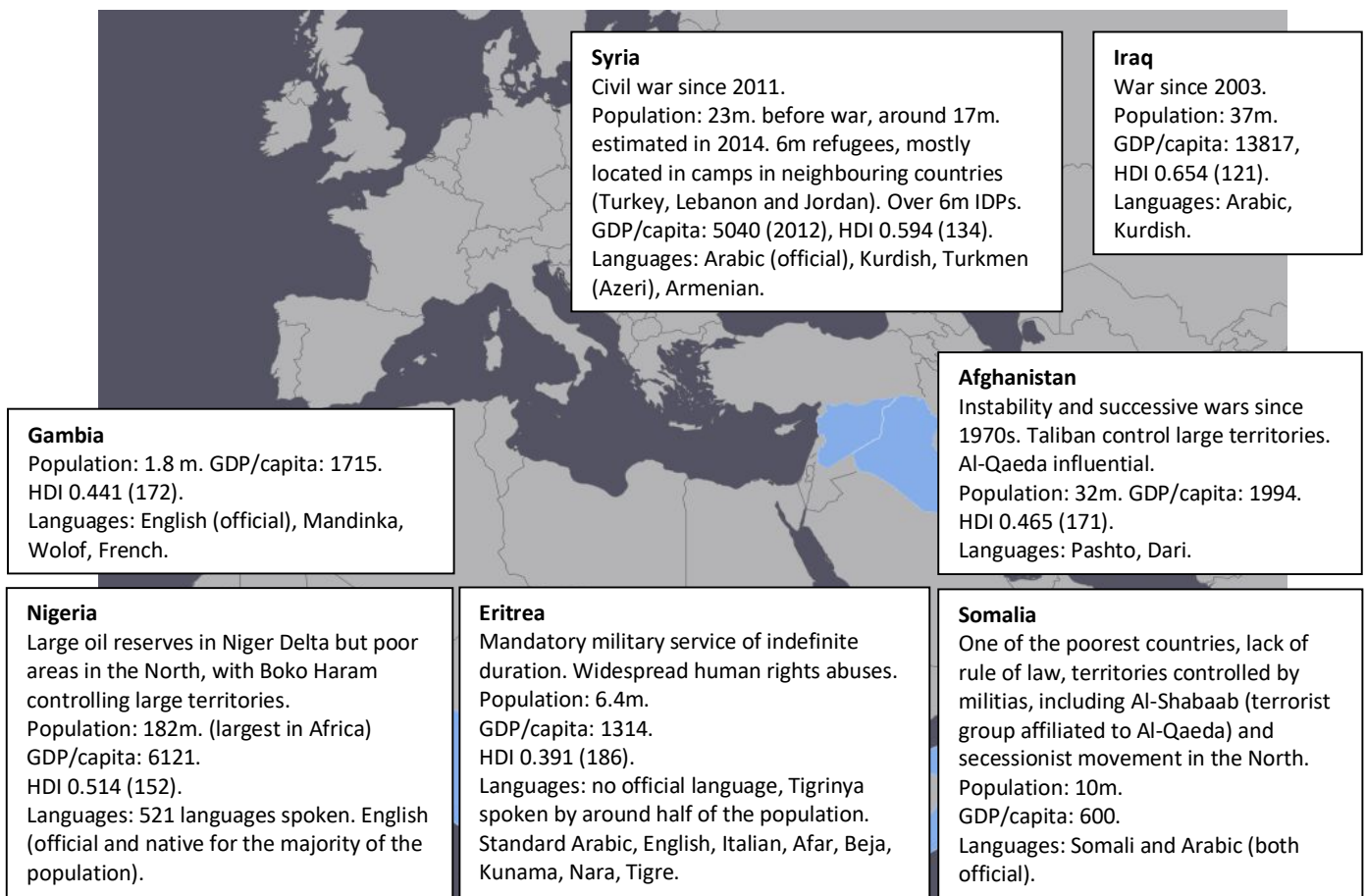
1 - The geopolitical context of migration

Aim: To provide background information on current patterns of migration (countries of origin and migration routes) and to indicate other sources of information.

European countries have always received refugees but there has been a significant increase in the number of people seeking refuge in Europe in the past few years. 2015 saw the largest number of arrivals in Europe: a little over one million people. 17% were women and 25% were children under the age of 18. The number decreased in 2016 but it is still much higher than in previous years. Unfortunately, however, the number of migrants who lost their lives at sea trying to reach Europe continued to increase.

Where are refugees coming from and why are they migrating to Europe?

84% of refugees come from three countries affected by on-going wars in the Middle-East: 49% from Syria, 21% from Afghanistan and 9% from Iraq. Others come from various African countries, the largest numbers from Nigeria, Eritrea, Somalia and Gambia. There are also refugees from other countries, including Pakistan, Iran and Egypt, as well as from countries in the East and South-East of Europe.



Notes: GDP/capita = Gross Domestic Product per capita – the total value of goods and services produced annually, expressed in international dollars, divided by the number of inhabitants and adjusted to take account of purchasing power parity; HDI = Human Development Index – a composite statistic referring to life expectancy, education and economic indicators; IDP = Internally Displaced Person

How are refugees getting to Europe?

Many of the refugees arriving in Europe have spent years in camps in Turkey, Lebanon or Ethiopia. Bad conditions in these camps and lack of prospects in the camps or in their countries of origin are among the factors that have impelled people to risk their lives trying to reach Europe. The majority of refugees use the Central Mediterranean or the Balkan route. There are also other routes and variations of the main routes.



The Balkan Route:

By sea from Turkey to Greek Islands (mostly Kos, Samos, Kios, Lesbos) and then by land via the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary, Croatia or Slovenia, towards Central, Northern and Western Europe.

The Central Mediterranean Route:

By land from Sub-Saharan Africa to Libya and then in often makeshift and overloaded boats from the Libyan coast to the Italian islands of Lampedusa and Sicily, to Malta, or rescued at sea by Italian and EU ships.

The Central Mediterranean route has been widely used by migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa since 2013, when civil war erupted in Libya. Absence of the rule of law and persistent instability in Libya has allowed trafficking networks to exploit those heading towards Europe. Large amounts of money are paid by refugees (often by collecting all the resources of the extended family) to be guided across borders or for a place in a boat. Thousands of refugees have lost their lives at sea in the past few years.

Up-to-date statistics are provided by:

- [International Organisation for Migration \(IOM\)](#).
- [European Asylum Support Office \(EASO\)](#).
- [Migration Policy Institute \(MPI\)](#).

Finding out about the background of the refugees in your group

There are several possible sources of information to consider:

- Information provided by the staff of the institution or organisation managing the camp/centre/facility or from key stakeholders such as intercultural mediators. They have data about the declared nationality of the refugees you will be working with and perhaps additional data. Note, however, that they may be unable to share some information with you due to the confidentiality requirements of their institution or their profession (for example in the case of social workers, psychologists or intercultural mediators).
- Information you can obtain yourself from the internet, from media articles and books. But avoid making generalisations: don't assume that what you read in such sources automatically applies to members of your group. If possible, check the reliability of the sources you use and compare what you read with information from other sources.

Do not ask refugees to provide information about themselves, their country of origin or the migration route they have followed. It should be made clear to them that your role is to provide language support and that you have no role in the asylum process. However, refugees may provide information about themselves in the course of language activities –, for example, in a general group discussion or in the products of some activities (e.g. drawings, checklists, etc.). Consider this information carefully and check the tool 3 on *Ethical and intercultural issues to be aware of when working with refugees* to avoid unintended negative consequences;

Here are some things to think about when designing language activities (again, don't ask refugees themselves):

A. The situation in the country of origin.

- Which countries do the refugees come from?
- If there are significant regional differences in their country of origin, from which region do they come?
- Are they from big cities or from rural areas?
- What languages are spoken in their region? (Combine this information with their *Plurilingual portrait: a reflective task for refugees* and *Refugees' linguistic profiles* – see Tools 38 and 27).
- What are the main religious groups in their country of origin and to which groups do the refugees you are working with belong?
- Do they belong to an ethnic minority or to the majority in their country? Are mixed marriages possible/exceptional/common? Are they accepted or do they cause problems?
- What was the refugees' everyday life like before they left their country of origin?
- How are families structured in their country of origin? What is the usual age for marriage? At what age is someone considered an adult?
- What is the education system like in the refugees' country of origin? Did they attend school? If yes, up to which level?
- Do they still have family in their country of origin? If so, are they in contact with family members/would they like to re-establish contact?

B. Reasons for migration

- Fleeing war or persecution.
- Desire to avoid military service.
- Desire to avoid forced marriage.
- Banished by the family.
- Extreme poverty and lack of prospects.
- Sent to Europe by the family to provide support for those remaining at home.
- Desire to reunite with family or community members who migrated to Europe and found a better life.

C. The migration route taken

- Did the refugees in your group spend time in a camp in a country close to their country of origin? If so, how much time? Where? In what type of conditions?
- What countries did they pass through?
- Were there longer stops on the way? (e.g. in a detention centre; in a camp run by a humanitarian organisation; to find work to pay for the next part of the journey; etc.).
- Did they make a sea crossing? What was it like?
- How was their travel organised? (e.g. individually; with a group from the same community; they paid smugglers for border or sea crossing; etc.).

D. The itinerary within Europe

- What was the refugees' point of entry in Europe? How was their experience of the first contact?
- What other European countries did they cross to reach their current location?
- Did they travel alone, as a family, in a larger group they were in before they reached Europe, or in a group that was formed after entering Europe?
- Did they submit an application for asylum? In which country?
- Is the country they are in at present their intended final destination or is it just a transit country?
- Which country is their final destination and why?

If you or members of your family have a migration background, think about some of these issues from your own/their perspective.

Reflecting on these questions will help you to understand the motivations, interests, and priorities of the refugees in your group, as well as issues they are likely to want to address or avoid during language support.

For further information, consult:

- the following sections of the website of the International Organization for Migration: [Countries](#), [Migration Newsdesk](#), and [Search \(stories\)](#).
- the UNHCR's website [Refworld](#).
- the following sections of the UNHCR's main website: [Stories](#) and [Refugees/Migrants Response – Mediterranean](#).