

How far can we go in welcoming migrants?

How far can we go in welcoming migrants? The migration crisis that has brought thousands of migrants to the gates of Europe is far from over. The incoming French government will need to imagine new solutions to avoid multiplying camps such as those at Calais and Paris.



Looking only at the stream of photos and press articles on the return of migrants to Calais or Paris makes current migration flows appear enormous and never-ending. At a time of real risk of foreign controlled terrorist attacks, this feeds into a political debate that often degenerates into a dialogue of the deaf between partisans of the positive aspects of immigration and those who perceive it as a major danger for the country. What is the truth of the situation?

Statistically, we can clearly see a worldwide “migration crisis” resulting from ongoing conflicts such as those in Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, South Sudan or even Eritrea, as well as recurring economic difficulties.

According to the most recent report of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), “65.3 million people in the world have been forced to flee their homes, an unprecedented number.

”While the great majority of these people are displaced internally within their own countries, 21.3 million have nevertheless taken refuge in another country, mostly near the conflict zones. Step by step, many of them have now arrived at the gates of Europe, which experienced 216,000 arrivals via the Mediterranean in 2014, 1.05 million in 2016 and 353,000 in 2016. In this context, requests for asylum in France have also increased (+22% in 2015, +6.5% in 2016), reaching 85,000 last year.

“This is a significant increase,” observes François Gemenne, research associate at the Institute of Political Science’s CERI center. “However, it is still relatively modest with respect to the size of the migration crisis and what is happening in neighboring countries.

”Thus, in 2015, Germany received 442,000 requests, Hungary 174,000, Sweden 156,000... Moreover, on average nearly one arrival in two obtains asylum in the European Union while in France the rate tops out at 37%. Nevertheless, “looking at images of migrants heaped up in Calais and then spread a little bit throughout the provinces, people have an impression of an unprecedented flow,” says Jean-Christophe Dumont, head of the OECD international migration division, “Yet, putting aside this magnifying effect, refugees represent only a small proportion of migration flows,” he says. Thus, last year, 26,500 people obtained refugee status, which is a small proportion of the 227,000 first residence permits granted during the same period, mostly for family reasons (88,000 permits) or because of student visas (70,000). In addition, there are those who have been refused exile but who have been able to remain in France owing to the small number of forced removals carried out (13,000 in 2016).

So, should France accept more migrants? Perhaps there is no choice. “There is no need to be exaggerate but everything points to the migration phenomenon continuing,” says Matthieu Tardis, a researcher at the IFRI Center for Migration and Citizenship.

“First, the world population is continuing to rise. Secondly, the gap between the wealth of countries will continue to nourish hopes of a better life elsewhere, particularly since transport has made moving much easier. “Moreover, to the extent that it is not possible to limit the tension points, particularly in the Middle East and in East Africa, people will certainly continue to flee wars. Finally, it is also probably necessary to expect migration due to climate change,” Tardis adds. Based on this scenario, certain political parties are tempted to close borders.

“People understand the migration phenomenon very poorly if they think that a border will stop migrants,” says François Gemenne. “You just have to look at the number of people who have come to Calais, which is one of the most highly guarded borders in the world, or those who cross the Mediterranean,” where 5,000 died during 2016, Gemenne says. In order to keep people at home, others are proposing to relaunch government development aid, which has hit a ceiling of 0.36% of GDP, far short of the 0.7% proposed by the United Nations.

On the other hand, more fatalistically, many people conclude that it will be necessary to accept more migrants and better. This could be achieved particularly by delivering humanitarian visas upstream rather than allowing asylum seekers to arrive anarchically.

However, it will also and above all be necessary to coordinate the arrivals. Currently, “we are witnessing a double concentration of migrants, both towards some European countries, and within some countries, in certain places such as Calais,” explains El Mouhoub Mouhoud, a professor of economics at the University of Paris-Dauphine, the author of “L’immigration en France. Mythes et réalités” (Publisher: Fayard). “If we could organize things better by sharing them out based on GDP and the unemployment rate in the various regions, things would work out much better,” he says. In France, the provisional resettlement of migrants from Calais in various provincial cities has, for the moment, led to increased solidarity rather than resistance.

On a European level, however, the difficulties facing the plan to relocalize 160,000 refugees from Greece and Italy to other European countries has shown that this is more easily said than done. Finally, there is another major task to be tackled, namely the integration of these new migrants, many of whom do not speak French, particularly into the labor market.

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