

World Refugee Numbers Climb To Record High

OTTAWA : Wars, violence and persecution worldwide drove refugee numbers to a fifth-straight record high in 2017, with Canada becoming the ninth-largest recipient of asylum seekers in the world, says a new UN report.

The annual Global Trends report from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees shows the world total of displaced people was 68.5 million last year.

In 2017 alone, more than 16 million people were newly displaced.

Looking at the numbers another way _ an average of one person became a refugee every two seconds last year.

These trends indicate that new, more collaborative solutions are needed to ensure countries and communities aren't left alone to deal with influxes of migrants, said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

"We are at a watershed, where success in managing forced displacement globally requires a new and far more comprehensive approach," he said.

"No one becomes a refugee by choice, but the rest of us can have a choice about how we help."

More than two-thirds of all refugees worldwide came from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.

For the fourth consecutive year, Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees, a total of 3.5 million people.

Canada was the ninth-largest recipient of asylum seekers, with 47,800 claims registered in 2017 _ more than twice the number of claims in 2016.

And for the first time in five years, the United States became the largest recipient of new asylum applications in 2017, with more than 330,000 claims lodged _ a 27 per cent jump from 2016.

These spikes in the numbers of asylum seekers in Canada and the U.S. have been the focus of heavy debate both at home and south of the border over the last year.

The issue came to a boiling point in recent days with strong backlash over a new U.S. "zero tolerance" policy against illegal asylum seekers who cross into the United States, under which they are charged with federal crimes and separated from their children. The children are detained in guarded, fenced enclosures, prompting widespread condemnation and protest.

Fallout continued Tuesday, with President Donald Trump once again taking to Twitter to defend the policy, blaming the

US Child Migrant Policy Wrong Says Trudeau

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who are living through this are enduring ... this is not the way we do things in Canada."

Trump's decision to reverse the practice marked a significant turnaround for a president who has made his hardline approach to immigration a cornerstone of his political identity, and who insisted that federal law gave his administration no choice but to separate families apprehended at the border.

Illegal migrants in the U.S. will continue to face the "zero-tolerance" policy, which includes detention and criminal prosecution, but the executive order will allow families to remain together while in custody, expedite their cases, and seek departmental help to house families.

In Canada, the Trudeau government was again under fire over the Safe Third Country agreement with the U.S., which requires would be asylum seekers to make their claims in the first "safe country" where they arrive.



A family stands outside their home in the Domiz camp for Syrian refugees, near the town of Dohuk, northern, Iraq. Special Envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Angelina Jolie, visited the camp on Sunday. (AP Photo/Claire Thomas)

opposition Democrats for weak border security laws.

"They don't care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our country, like MS-13," Trump tweeted, referring to the notorious, international criminal gang.

The UN report showed a total of 138,700 unaccompanied and separated child refugees and asylum seekers were reported in

2017 by 63 UNHCR operations.

Despite the stark numbers and increasingly heated political rhetoric, Grandi says he believes there is hope for the world's refugees.

Fourteen countries are pioneering a new blueprint for responding to refugee situations as part of a global compact on refugees, which will soon be ready for adoption by the UN General Assembly.

European Govts. To Toughen Checks On Asylum Seekers

PARIS: European governments are planning tougher checks at train and bus stations as part of efforts to stop asylum-seekers from travelling freely across the continent's open borders.

German media reported Wednesday that the proposal is part of a draft agreement being circulated ahead of a meeting of leaders from 10 European countries in Brussels on Sunday.

Traft also foresees penalties for asylum-seekers who don't stay in the first European Union countries they registered in.

Italy's anti-migrant interior minister says after meeting with right-wing Austrian officials that changing political winds in Europe could bring significant changes to the way Europe controls its exterior borders.

The meeting in Rome on Wednesday between the populist officials underlined a new hard-line axis forming in Europe on migration issues.

Hungary has approved a constitutional amendment making it

more difficult for refugees to gain asylum in Hungary and passed legislation which threatens people helping asylum-seekers with up to a year in prison.

The amendment of the constitution also includes a ban on homelessness, creates new courts to handle public administration cases and says the state must defend Hungary's Christian culture.

Parliament also passed the so-called "Stop Soros" law, which says people aiding refugees and asylum-seekers can be imprisoned for up to a year. Orban blames financier George Soros for fomenting mass migration into Europe, charges he denies.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, whose country will soon take over the European Union's rotating presidency, says he hopes a weekend mini-summit will address an "overdue" solution to the continent's issues with migration.

Pope Francis is urging people not to "let fear get in the way of welcoming our neighbour in need."



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