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Syrian Refugees

The Syrian Crisis isn't new. Anti-Government protests started in Syria in early March of 2011. However, these peaceful protests escalated after they were stopped by the Syrian government in a very violent way. Since then, rebels have been fighting back against the current government's regime. In October of 2015, Russia began launching airstrikes against ISIS forces inside of Syria. This prompted even more Syrians to leave the country, fleeing for safety. It also made it more difficult for humanitarian aid to reach Syrian civilians (“Quick Facts: What You Need to Know about the Syrian Crisis”).

The Topic of syrian refugees has been a hot one for debates the past couple of years. 13.5 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance due to a devastating civil war taking place in their country. Of those 13.5 million people, 4.6 million are refugees. About 6.6 million are displaced within the country, meaning they are still in the country, but without a home. Half of these people‒about 6.5 million‒are children (World Vision Staff).

So why are the Syrians fleeing their country? For one, they are being killed within their own country. Since the Syrian civil war began, 320 thousand people have been killed, including nearly 12,000 children. Not to mention that 1.5 million people have been wounded or permanently disabled by this conflict. The country has also been stricken with a collapsed infrastructure. Syria's healthcare, education systems, and other infrastructure have been destroyed. The country’s economy is also in shambles (World Vision Staff).

The Syrian civilians are fleeing to many different countries. A very large majority of refugees are living in Jordan and Lebanon. In August of 2013, more refugees began to escape into Iran in a newly opened border crossing. Unfortunately, the refugees that have escaped to there are now trapped within Iran's own internal insurgent conflict, and on top of that Iran is struggling to meet the needs of the Syrian refugees. An increasing number of Syrians are also fleeing into Turkey, creating new cultural tensions within the country. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are also attempting to make the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, from Turkey into Greece, where they hope to find a better future in Europe. Unfortunately, the refugees have been met with inopportune circumstances within most of the countries that they have decided to flee to (“Quick Facts: What You Need to Know about the Syrian Crisis”).

Sweden is one of the countries that has been accepting refugees. From 2004-2012, Sweden was accepting large amounts of immigrants from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia‒so much so that their population grew by a half million. There is a 54% employment rate among immigrants, and 16% of newborns have mothers from non-Western countries. With all the free-time that comes with being unemployed, a large number of the newly Swedish have taken to rape. Sweden is now the country with the second-highest rate of rape at 53.2 cases per 100,000 people, which is six times higher than the United States. This statistic was from 2008, so it’s most likely higher as they’ve been accepting more refugees (Greenfield).  
 Amarillo, Texas has had some refugees sent to them because of a movement set forth from the Obama Administration. Not wanting the same thing to happen to her town, a woman named Karen Sherman spoke to a crowd protesting the planting of immigrants in Missoula, a small town in western Montana. “Amarillo is overrun with refugees… our city is failing because of the refugees. We have 22 different languages spoken in our schools. We’ve got 42 languages being fielded by our 911 call centers, and crime is just through the roof. We need to exercise caution, especially for the sake of our children,” Sherman says. She also mentions that Amarillo is a city of 200,000 people and has a crime rate that has surpassed those of cities much larger, such as Fort Worth. She, along with others at the protest, are afraid that their town will have a much higher amount of crime and rape (Hohmann).

Amarillo has recently been named the fifth most dangerous city in Texas, and was nationally recognized as having one of the highest rates of rape in the United States. In Rotherham, more than 1,400 children have been beaten, raped, and trafficked, which has gone mostly unreported in the U.S. “It was covered up by the local government for fear of being viewed as racist. This only came to light because a journalist decided we needed to know about that, not the government,” Sherman said. “You can have female equality, or you can have refugees. You cannot have both.” Sherman, along with some other protesters, were met with some resistance. With she was talking to crowds, she caught six people holding signs, calling them ‘racists’ (Hohmann).

The topic of accepting the Syrian refugee’s has become a hot debate in the United States. However, two presidential candidates (Ted Cruz and Donald Trump) both offer a similar opinion when asked about the situation. Cruz thinks that “... Muslims fleeing the Syrian civil war should be repopulated to other Muslim countries” (Schleifer). Trump states that “This could be one of the great Trojan horses.” Both candidates agree that terrorists could very easily hijack the refugee situation, and use it to infiltrate the United States much easier (Kopan). While these two candidates can both easily agree on the situation, the student body at LeRoy High School is not nearly as uniform with their answers.

We conducted a survey (Appendix A) that was given to both Seniors and Juniors, and the results were surprising. 42% of the people surveyed did not think that accepting refugees was a good idea; 58% thought that we should accept the refugees. Even when there are clean cut ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers, there is still a grey area. “... there should be extensive background checks in place to ensure our safety. Also, we should only allow women and children into the country” is what one student said. Several people seemed to agree on the idea of accepting refugees after “extensive background checks.” Another student stated that “Syrian Refugees are escaping the harsh world of war. They have been through traumatic events. If they each receive a safe amount of background screening and are proven safe, there is no reason not to take them.” These responses showcase how some of the United States is feeling towards the refugees. They want to allow them into the nation, but they don’t want to run the risk of terrorists hiding in the crowds, or allow a wolf in sheep’s clothing so to speak. “I think we should let the Syrian refugees in from Europe, however, if they are to come into this country, they will not be given handouts. If we were in the same position, we would not be given handouts.” This student also raises a valid point. If citizens in the United States were leaving the country in mass, would other countries give our refugees homes, or even government care? While government handouts aren’t the main concern with bringing refugees over, it is definitely a point of discussion.

Other students answered a little more brutally than others. “Many terrorists slipped into Europe as refugees. They can slip from Europe to America just as easily.” Without directly saying ‘no’, it is obvious that this student is against the refugees emigrating into the United States. “We first need to get the thousands of starving, and homeless Americans a healthy living. Once we save our own country we could consider letting more people in.” This response raises a very good point. How can the United States accommodate thousands more of unemployed people? In truth, we can’t. If the United States still has an unemployment rate of 5% (Wells and Fahey), then, realistically, it wouldn’t be plausible to take on thousands of more people. Not only that, but accepting them greatly increases the risk of domestic terrorism. One student believes that this is exactly why we can’t accept them. “With the large influx of these or any other refugees it becomes a harder task to fend against domestic terrorism.”

The future plans for refugees for the United States is to accept 10,000 of them, in order of vulnerability. The first ones to be screened for entry will be survivors of torture, those with severe medical conditions or disabilities, and women and children. The screening that they must go through to be able to enter the U.S. is among the highest level of travelers, involving the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense. The refugees are admitted only when they pass all tests mentioned above, as well as having all biometric information on them compared to intelligence databases to ensure safety. Over the last few years, the process has been enhanced to put all of the many databases to use to ensure the screening process is as effective and accurate as possible.

In conclusion, the United States is very split about this issue. A lot of the websites we found talked about how it was our duty to bring refugees in, and how it’s the American way to take care of others, but there were just as many that were against them, highlighting the risks involved with accepting them. The same goes for the results from the survey we conducted. It was just about split fifty-fifty. Age and gender didn’t seem to have an effect on the results, either.

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Appendix A

In the survey conducted, we asked the following questions:

1. What is your gender?
2. Should we accept refugees from Europe?
3. Why should or shouldn’t we accept them? Please write at least two sentences.