

**EU: Provide Protection for Syrian Refugees** Human Rights Watch 23 December 2012 The European Union and its member states should do more to help the thousands of Syrian asylum seekers trying to reach Europe as the Syrian crisis worsens and winter sets in, Human Rights Watch said today.

Between March 2011 and September 2012, 21,000 Syrians claimed asylum in the European Union. While some EU countries offer Syrians safety, in others, including Greece, they face detention, significant obstacles in getting protection, and even forced return, Human Rights Watch said.

(...) Since September, at least 82 people, including Syrians, have died in two shipwrecks off the coast of Turkey in attempts to reach Greece.

To reduce the risk of such tragedies, ensure protection for those who need it, and ease the burden on neighboring countries hosting more than half a million Syrians, EU member states should take concrete steps to facilitate access to European territory, Human Rights Watch said, including simplifying onerous visa procedures and providing humanitarian visas.

The EU has not agreed to a common approach to Syrians fleeing the conflict and Human Rights Watch research indicates a patchy record for EU member states. Germany and Sweden, which have received most Syrian asylum claims, automatically grant some form of protection to Syrians. But in Greece, where almost 10,000 Syrians are known to have entered since 2011, only six have obtained some form of protection.

In countries such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece, Syrians are subject to immigration detention that can last from a few days to several months. Most EU states have frozen deportations of Syrians, but Greece has deported Syrians and the UK has attempted to. Syrians are also being transferred between EU countries under the Dublin II regulation, which permits EU countries to send asylum seekers back to the first EU country they entered, possibly delaying their access to protection. (...)

All EU member states should follow binding European Commission directives and ensure harmonized procedures, including for lodging asylum claims. They should have common standards to qualify for protection, including subsidiary protection based on indiscriminate violence arising from armed conflict in Syria. (...)

As the number of Syrians seeking protection in the EU grows, EU member states should consider invoking an EU-wide temporary protection regime, similar to the approach already taken by Syria's neighbors, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

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