

2016 Report: Situation of refugees in Spain and Europe Executive Summary



CEA(R)

Comisión Española
de Ayuda al Refugiado

REFUGIADOS





A group of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan on board a fragile craft heading for the Greek island of Lesbos. ACNUR estimates that 3,770 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean in 2015. © ACNUR / Ivor Prickett.

Executive Summary

2016 Report

Situation of refugees
in Spain and Europe

1. Introduction



The Syrian city of Homs, destroyed after five years of war. © ACNUR / Andrew McConnell.



The 14th annual report from the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR in Spanish) analyses the situation of refugees in the world, in the European Union, and mainly in Spain. By the end of 2014, almost 60,000,000 people had been forcibly displaced due to armed conflicts and human rights violations, the greatest number since the end of the Second World War. The worsening Syrian conflict obliged hundreds of thousands of people to seek a safe home on our continent. Since it was impossible to come by safe and legal avenues, they had to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean in fragile vessels. The incessant succession of tragedies at sea, which cost the lives of nearly 4,000 people in 2015, stirred European citizens, who were especially moved by the photo of little Aylan's lifeless body on a beach. Despite the outrage and the ensuing social movement, all of the agreements by European leaders to relocate and resettle 180,000 refugees turned out to be lip service due to the lack of solidarity and the priority given to externalising borders with agreements such as the one signed with Turkey in March of this year, which CEAR has denounced. In 2015, Spain attended to nearly 15,000 asylum seekers, the highest number ever registered. Nevertheless, for yet another year this accounted for only 1% of those who were attended to by the 28 countries of the European Union as a whole. Furthermore, the Government only granted the status of refugee to 220 people, and subsidiary protection to 800, while denying any kind of protection to 68.5% of the people whose applications it dealt with. Its practice of "push-backs" in Ceuta and Melilla continued, though recently condemned by the United Nations, as did the difficulty for them (and for stowaway immigrants) to access the procedure in immigration detention centres (CIEs in Spanish). For yet another year, the right to asylum was eroded alarmingly in Spain and Europe •



2. Refugees around the world

One of the thousands of refugees from Burundi who live in Tanzania. © ACNUR / Benjamin Loyseau.

Over the past five years, the Syrian people's diaspora has led the world to witness the greatest exodus since the end of the Second World War in 1945. By 5th May 2016, the conflict in the country had already led to the exile of nearly 5 million people, nearly half of them settling in Turkey. Out of the 59.5 million people forcibly displaced in the world by the end of 2014 (8 million more than the year before), 19.5 million were registered as refugees, 38.2 million remained within the borders of their country of origin, and 1.8 million were awaiting a solution to their request for international protection. UNHCR estimates that in 2015 the figures for forced displacement around the world exceeded 60 million people.

Refugees are usually very young (51% are under 18 years of age) and 86% live in very poor countries. The possibilities of obtaining international protection and starting up a new life in an industrialised country are continually decreasing due to the increasing impermeability of borders. This means that refugees are making more risky, dangerous journeys—almost 4,000 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean in 2015, which is 70% of the total of such fatalities in the world.

The Middle East is the region with the greatest forced displacement of population on the planet. This is due to the continuing Palestinian conflict, instability in Iraq, and above all the conflict that Syria has been suffering since 2011. The latest figures from May 2016 reveal a tragedy of immense proportions: nearly 4.9 million refugees and 7.6 million people displaced within the borders of the devastated country, where over 100,000 civilians have died due to the war and more than 640,000 are surviving in cities under military siege. In Palestine, the blockade on the Gaza Strip has continued, as well as the attacks on autonomous Palestinian territories by the State of Israel, which caused the death of over 100 people with nearly 20,000 people injured. In Iraq, the armed conflict has continued between government forces and different opposition groups. In Iran, meanwhile, the repression against human rights activists has persisted, as well as the widespread application of the death penalty.

In addition to the Middle East, other regions of the world and especially Africa have generated a significant volume of forced displacements •




Photo of the refugee camp in Idomeni (Greece) near the frontier with Macedonia, which was evacuated in May 2016. © ACNUR / Achilleas Zavalis.

Over 60 million people forcibly displaced

UNHCR estimates that the number of 59.5 million people who by the end of 2014 had abandoned their homes as a result of violence and human rights violations was surpassed throughout 2015. At that time, out of those 59.5 million people:

- 19.5 million were refugees: 14.4 million were sheltered by UNHCR and 5.1 million by the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- 38.2 million people were displaced within the frontiers of their own countries.
- 1.8 million were asylum seekers.

By May 2016, the war in Syria had forced nearly 4.9 million people into exile and displaced 7.6 million.

Source: ACNUR.

3. Europe and refugees

Throughout 2015, hundreds of thousands of refugees knocked on the doors of Europe, which has become a fortress. They were fleeing wars and systematic human rights violations. On being denied secure and legal avenues of accessing international protection, they had no option but to risk their lives on the Mediterranean and to attempt to get past borders raised as fortified perimeters. Last year, the 28 EU countries dealt with 1,321,600 asylum seekers, but they took in very unequal shares: Germany alone took care of 476,510, while Spain, for example, broke its paltry annual record with 15,000, barely 1% of the total. The asylum policies of other countries such as Hungary took on a xenophobic, authoritarian attitude. While thousands of Europeans, social organisations, and municipal and regional governments rallied in

defence of a humane response to the refugees, the EU leaders and national governments remained bogged down by red tape and their lack of political will. They were incapable of going beyond the rhetoric and providing a necessary, shared response to this drama that has been unprecedented in Europe since the wars in the Balkans in the 90s. By the end of May 2016, only 1,716 of the 180,000 people had been relocated as agreed the previous summer, and of these only 105 were in Spain.

The European Union needs a true, efficient Common European Asylum System inspired by what it recognises as its founding principles. Once again this year, significant differences have been identified in the percentages of international protection



Two African refugees held in the centre of Lampedusa (Italy). © ACNUR / Francesco Malavolta.



Refugees crossing Macedonia's border with Syria in January 2016. © ACNUR / Igor Pavicevic.

granted, as well as in the conditions of reception. This situation makes it more difficult to achieve a Common European Asylum System.

Without a drastic change in the direction of the European Union's migration and asylum policies, the right to asylum will become a thing of the past for

a community of nations that prided itself on being exemplary in the matter of human rights. Access to secure and legal avenues by which refugees may enter a territory, an end to illegal push-backs at its outermost borders and the guarantee of adequate protection and a civilised reception must be priorities •

Asylum seekers in the European Union

	2015	2014
• European Union	1,321,600	625,000
• Germany	476,510	202,645
• Hungary	177,135	42,775
• Sweden	162,450	81,180
• Austria	88,160	28,035
• Italy	84,085	64,625
• France	75,750	64,310
• Spain*	14,780	5,947

Source: Eurostat.

* In 2015, Spain was in 13th place among the 28 countries of the EU. According to provisional data from the OAR (Spanish Asylum and Refugee Office), 14,881 people requested asylum in Spain in 2015.



“In 2015, approximately 500,000 people came from Turkey to the island of Lesbos, an island with a population of about 85,000 inhabitants. [...] After the summer, the island became a place where international organisations, NGOs and volunteers from all over the world began to establish themselves to work with the people arriving on the island. Volunteers, activists, small and large NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders, Doctors of the World, Save The Children, Oxfam and the authorities and institutions have worked since then in harmony in an organised way, keeping their competences clearly defined. The island’s citizens have also shown their utmost solidarity in this situation, which deserves admiration. In fact, there are those who are proposing Lesbos as a candidate for the next Nobel Peace Prize.

The journeys to the island of Lesbos set off every day from the Turkish coast in the region of Çanakkale in the north-east of the country. Before this stage, refugees pass through Istanbul, where they first come into contact with the traffickers in Taksim square in the very centre of the city. Those with

greater economic possibilities are given false passports and come to Europe on flights from Latin America. In the case of Spain, most of the Syrian refugees who have arrived in our country by air have done so with false passports of different nationalities on routes originating mostly in Brazil. This route is extremely expensive, so it is only accessible to few. In fact, since the first quarter of 2015 this route has seen a considerable decline. They need to arrive with a false passport because it is important to remember that in September 2011, faced with the first arrivals of Syrian families to our country after the conflict had begun, Spain introduced the requirement for a transit visa for people of Syrian origin...” •

*From the CEAR report *Lesbos, ground zero for the right to asylum* (March 2016)*

European Union - Turkey: an unacceptable agreement

Throughout 2015, the European Union continued its commitment to progressively making its borders impermeable. At the Euro-African summit held in Malta in November, it gave priority to control over migrations, and made cooperation in development conditional upon the South identifying with this goal. For its part, Hungary completed construction of a 175 km long fence on its border with Serbia, and Bulgaria extended the one that separates its territory from Turkey for another 130 km. The culmination of this policy came in the agreement reached on 18th March 2016, by the EU's heads of state and government with Turkey in the matter of migrations, which CEAR has denounced before the European Commission, the European Commissioner for Human Rights and the European

Ombudsman, with the support of over three hundred social organisations and more than 11,000 citizens, demanding its withdrawal.

Via this agreement, Turkey accepted the immediate return of migrants in an irregular situation, and also of people arriving in Greece from Turkey whose applications for asylum have been rejected for processing. People from Syria arriving in Greece as of 20th March 2016, are also to be sent to Turkey. For each one of them, the EU agrees to resettle a Syrian refugee from Turkey into EU territory. In exchange, Brussels gives funds to Turkey, reactivates its adhesion to the EU and progresses towards liberalisation of the visa procedure. As has happened in the past decade, this agreement will entail refugees resorting to ways of entering Europe that are even more dangerous •

What does the EU-Turkey agreement contravene?

- Collective expulsions are expressly prohibited in Art. 4 of Protocol 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The principle of non-refoulement in Art. 33 of the Geneva Convention, which states that no one shall be returned to a country where their life is in danger.
- Any expulsion of a foreigner requires legal guarantees according to Articles 12 and 13 of the Directive on Returns.
- Turkey is not a safe country for refugees due to its geographic limitation clause from the Geneva Convention (Art. 39 of the Procedures Directive) and does not guarantee the principle of non-refoulement of refugees.
- The principle of non-discrimination due to country of origin, Art. 3 of the Geneva Convention.
- Lack of minimum standards as regards the reception of refugees in Greece recognised by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011.

Europe: Act now!



Proposals from CEAR for a true European policy for refugees

The European Union must take basic steps to observe human rights and the right to asylum urgently in order to respond to this situation. CEAR believes it is essential to take the following steps as a priority, which can be achieved in the short, medium and long-term:

- Develop a new European asylum and migration policy that gives priority to people and human rights.
- Launch a new effective rescue and salvage operation backed by the necessary means to prevent deaths in the Mediterranean.
- Open secure legal channels to guarantee refugees' right to access asylum. In order to do so, it is necessary to bolster resettlement programmes that are coherent with the number of refugees today, accepting an equitable share in solidarity with all the states; to guarantee the possibility of applying for asylum in embassies and consulates in third (non-EU) countries; to activate policies to grant humanitarian visas; to withdraw the demand for a transit visa for people from countries in conflict; and to make the requirements for family reunification more flexible.
- Apply the Temporary Protection Directive, using its mechanism to tackle humanitarian emergencies.
- Decide to study and address the true causes of forced displacement of population towards Europe.

4. Refugees in Spain

1. Spain took in only 1% of the people who applied for asylum in the European Union.

Compared to the 5,947 people who formalised their request for international protection in 2014, in 2015 nearly 15,000 people did so (14,780 according to Eurostat; 14,881 according to provisional data from the Spanish Asylum and Refuge Office (OAR)). This is the highest amount registered in Spain and yet barely accounts for 1% of those registered in the European Union as a whole. For yet another year, we have received a tiny percentage of the people seeking international protection in Europe. More than half came from Syria (5,724) and Ukraine (3,420). The arrival of Syrian refugees via the BeniEnzar border made Melilla the province that received the most applications for the first time (6,368; meaning 42.8% of the total).

Lastly, throughout 2015 only four of the people who arrived as stowaways in boats docking at Spanish ports were able to apply for international protection. As for Immigration Detention Centres (CIE in Spain), although CEAR has not been able to discover the total number of applications made in these centres last year, it is clear that access to the procedure varied greatly depending on the centre where the person needing international protection was detained. This depended on the entities and bodies' representatives that were able to enter these centres to provide information and whether the centres had a legal advice service, which only exists in the centres in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. In these cases, there are greater possibilities to access information, which has entailed an increase in the number of applications in recent years •



2. The Government intends to give legal coverage for illegal push-backs in Ceuta and Melilla.

One of the most worrying aspects related to the right to asylum is the “special regime” applied in Ceuta and Melilla, established by the Organic Law for the Protection of Public Safety, whose First Final Provision amended the Law on Foreign Persons in order to allow migrants to be turned back without any kind of procedure or safeguard. In CEAR’s opinion, the “push-backs” made in the two autonomous cities are illegal. They breach the principle of non-refoulement for migrants, since in many cases they imply collective expulsions (prohibited by Article 4 of Protocol 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights), and infringe upon Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which requires an effective internal appeal enabling the case to be examined regarding a defensible complaint, and a suitable remedy offered. Furthermore, in 2015 the

Government continued to restrict travel to the peninsula for people who requested asylum in Ceuta, which is a flagrant violation of the constitutional right enshrined in Article 19 of the Constitution concerning the freedom of residence and movement within the national territory.

Moreover, as ruled by the European Court of Human Rights in its historical sentence of 22nd April 2014, in “A.C and others v. Spain” (examined in CEAR’s 2015 Report), the effect of legal appeals must be guaranteed as regards suspending denials or inadmissions of international protection at borders, and any return of migrants must be automatically suspended until a decision is taken regarding the fuller details of the matter. If not, situations such as those described in the preamble to Chapter 3 of the Annual Report will be repeated, with a procedure at the border in which restrictive criteria sometimes converge •

A slight rise was also seen in applications being accepted for processing for persecution by reasons of sexual orientation in some countries, such as Gambia and Cameroon, which include prison sentences for homosexuality in their legislation. Where as in previous years most applications from Cameroon for this reason were denied, last year eight of the eleven applications accepted for processing alleged persecution due to their sexual orientation.

Marie was not so lucky. Fatherless, at 15 years of age she was obliged by her uncle to marry an older man who physically, psychologically and sexually abused her for 17 years. She never found protection even within her own family, who always forced her to go back to her husband, nor from the authorities in Cameroon. She was only able to escape this situation when her husband passed away, but according to Levirate tradition she would have to marry her brother-in-law. She rejected this second forced marriage and fled to the city, to a female friend’s house. However, her in-laws continued to look for her and held on to her children to put pressure on her to return. Yet for the first time since she had been a teenager she was able to be herself and to feel freedom. After suffering sexual abuse and beatings from her husband for years, she built up a rejection towards the male gender and little by little she fell in love with her friend, with whom she began a relationship in secret. After a few months, she received a call from her son warning her that her in-laws would report her as a homosexual if she did not return and comply with the Levirate tradition. Faced with this predicament, Marie decided to flee. In March 2015, she applied for international protection in the airport of Madrid-Barajas.

Marie’s odyssey

The application was denied after the initial interview and a re-examination, although there was a favourable report from UNHCR, because the OAR (Spanish Asylum and Refuge Office) indicated that her allegations were implausible. CEAR’s legal service launched an appeal before the Spanish National Court and

requested that her return flight be suspended as an urgent cautionary measure. The National Court did not order this and so CEAR presented an urgent measure to the European Court of Human Rights, which did finally decree that the return flight for that same day should be halted, authorising her entry into Spanish territory.

One year after her application, on ending this report, the National Court has passed sentence on the main appeal and has recognised that Marie’s application should have been accepted for processing. It will be possible to implement this sentence due to the decision by the ECHR, which halted the refoulement and prevented Marie from again suffering abuse from her family, from being forced to marry her brother-in-law and from being jailed due to her sexual orientation. This case illustrates the difficulties in accessing effective legal protection encountered by people applying for international protection at border posts and in international detention centres, whether this is due to the short deadlines for presenting the necessary appeals, or due to the restrictive criteria of the National Court. It is true that, as analysed in chapter 4 of CEAR’s 2014 Report, the National Court has accepted the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court in its detailed decisions about admitting cases for processing, but not as regards adopting urgent cautionary measures which, as illustrated by the case of Marie, are fundamental for this right to be effective •



3. Protection for refugees recedes in Spain.

The Government's precarious compromise with refugees shrank further in 2015, when just 220 people achieved the status of refugee compared to 384 in 2014; and 800 achieved subsidiary protection compared to 1,199 in 2014. The percentage of people who saw their international protection rejected rose from 56,14% in 2014 to 68.52%. Residency was not granted for humanitarian reasons to a single person out of the 2,220 people who were denied international protection. It is disturbing that the rates for granting protection have fallen when there is an increase in applications for

protection by people coming from countries in conflict. It should also be added that a different treatment is identified towards applicants from Syria and those who come from other countries in conflict such as Ukraine and Mali, whose processes are "frozen" while waiting for the conflicts to end.

As for the status of statelessness, 1,151 people applied for this last year, nearly all of whom were from the Saharan camps of Tindouf, in the Algerian desert. Slowly, the Spanish Asylum and Refugee Office (OAR) continued to deal with these requests in a favourable light, in keeping with the criteria defined by the Supreme Court •

Legal aid in Spain's Immigration Detention Centres (CIEs)

There follows an account that illustrates how important it is for the CIE detainees to be able to get legal advice, reflecting what it often means to be returned to their country of origin. In August, 2014, a young Algerian man arrived on the coast of Almeria together with 18 other people in a vessel that had left from his country. He was taken by the National Police to the CIE centre in Valencia, where he was kept for 47 days. "I applied for international protection due to the persecution I had suffered because of my sexual orientation, but my request was denied and I was ejected to Algeria. Before, I reported that three police officers at the CIE centre had assaulted other internees and myself."

On arriving at Ghazouet, a veritable ordeal began. Algerian police officers were waiting for them at the police station at the port. After they were assisted by a doctor and a psychologist, they took them to other police premises where they warned them they would be judged and maybe condemned to six months in prison and a fine. "When we arrived at the police station, they began to search us, they stripped us, they took photos of us and they interrogated us. We were seated in a room when the inspector came in and asked: 'Where's the queer one?' Then they all began to ask who he was referring to. The police officers had checked my travel bag and

had seen among my papers the rejection of asylum in Spain. They humiliated me; they called me everything; they made me think that I was no longer a person, but an animal."

At night, he was shut in a cell alone. Again he was insulted, abused and offended with extreme verbal and physical violence. Two days later he was able to escape and flee to the city by hiding in a lorry. After various incidents, he managed to reach Oran, where in November, 2014, he was able to board a craft again to Almería. "There was no way I could stay in Algeria because if the police got me again they could kill or rape me again; they would treat me even worse than they had done before for being homosexual and having escaped."

In Spain, he was detained and taken again to the CIE centre in Valencia. "I was very afraid because if they sent me back again to Algeria my life would be in danger. Advised by a CEAR lawyer in Valencia, I requested asylum again and this time they accepted my application for processing and I was able to leave the CIE centre." After over a year, they finally called him for a second interview in Madrid and in 2016 he obtained the status of refugee.



Children in an orphanage in Homs, Syria.
© ACNUR / Andrew McConnell.

4. A photo with an impact on the world.

The extent of the tragedy in Syria and the deaths in the Mediterranean were summed up in the photograph of the lifeless body of little AylanKurdi, published on 3rd September, 2015, by media around the world. This actively rallied part of Spanish and European society in defence of refugees and the right to asylum. While the Government negotiated with its European peers regarding the shares for relocating and resettling, which until then had been met slowly and inefficiently, different local and regional administrations expressed their wish to contribute to receiving refugees. They prepared for this with help from sympathetic citizens and from social organisations.

The treatment of news about the so-called “refugee crisis”, which in most of the media began as of August 2015, spread a more favourable consideration of refugees than had been seen beforehand, helping to raise this social awareness. The main media channels explained that the vast majority of the people arriving by sea to Europe were fleeing conflicts, for which reason they had taken the decision forcibly. Above all, the matter was treated much more personally, since they told of the suffering of these human beings in the journey towards Europe and their longing for a new life, while establishing the following dominant idea in their discourse: “Europe must do something.” However, until today European governments have done very little •

5. Slow compliance with the European commitment to receiving refugees.

At the end of October, the Ministry of Employment and Social Security got in touch with CEAR and the other entities as well as the Refugee Reception Centres (CARs in Spanish) via the General Direction of Migrations in order to report on the imminent arrival and reception of a group of 19 Eritreans and Syrians from Italy. On 8th November, only 11 Eritreans and one Syrian arrived at the airport in Madrid, due to 7 of them rejecting Spain as a destination. Three of them were received by CEAR in Bilbao.

After their arrival, they were immediately taken to different reception centres managed by different nongovernmental organisations in Madrid, Valladolid, La Rioja and Bilbao. The person from Syria was received in a CAR and currently has legal assistance from CEAR. They arrived exhausted and disorientated, so in the airport itself it was first necessary for professionals to carry out an interview aimed at containing the situation and informing them about it. Once they were settled in the centres to which they were sent, a process began to incorporate them into the reception location, which is backed during the first 18 or 24 months by the relevant entity in the context of the refugee reception programme. For the first 6 to 9 months, they are to reside in a reception facility where all of their basic needs will be covered and they will get professional social, health, psychological, labour and legal assistance. Between the following 6 and 11 months, they then live in independent homes with basic needs covered via economic aid and professional monitoring, and in the last four to six months they will continue with professional support and cover for sporadic expenditure.

In the case of the three Eritreans who arrived at a CEAR apartment in Bilbao, their level of autonomy was very low. They are people with great communication difficulties (they only knew their

native language, Tigrinya) and an extreme lack of knowledge of how a big city functions. In spite of these difficulties, on ending this report their level of autonomy has improved a great deal. They have begun Spanish classes, they are following an itinerary of insertion into the job market and they are able to handle themselves in Bilbao without problems.

In December, the ministry again got in touch with CEAR because six of the seven people who had not wished to travel in November were finally going to be relocated in Spain, specifically in the reception centre this organisation manages in Getafe, Madrid. Thus, on 23rd December four men and two women arrived at Madrid airport. This second group was a little better oriented, although their state of health was worse than that of the people who had arrived in the first group. On the first days of their stay in the centre, they underwent complete health check-ups and their levels of stress were reduced compared to the state in which they arrived after a long, tough journey. Afterwards, a process of integration into society began and day by day they are improving their level of autonomy.

By 30th May 2016, 87 people more had arrived in Spain as part of the group of 586 refugees that the Government had announced it would receive before the following August, relocating and resettling them. Their nationalities were Syrian, Iraqi, Eritrean and Central African, and they came from Greece and Italy. They were accommodated in different provinces.

In summary, by then Spain had received only 105 people of the 9,323 it has agreed to receive via the relocation planned in the agreements of June and September 2015, and it had not yet resettled any of the 1,449 it has accepted. This is typical of the general situation, since by the same date the countries of the EU had only relocated 1,716 of the 180,000 people agreed upon: 674 from Italy and 1,044 from Greece •



Refugee camp in north-eastern Tanzania.
© ACNUR / Benjamin Loyseau.

Proposals from CEAR: Five commitments from the new Government to refugees

Through CEAR we request that the new Government and future Parliament in the next legislature put the following measures into practice urgently:

1. Withdrawal of Spain's support for the EU-Turkey Statement, immediately urging suspension of its application and challenging it via the existing channels for this purpose..

2. Immediate reception in Spain of refugees presently in Greece or Italy in compliance with the relocation agreements adopted by the European Council.

3. Putting into practice safe and legal avenues of access to the asylum procedure:

- Making it possible in practice to apply for asylum in Spanish embassies and consulates.

- Issuing humanitarian visas more easily.
- Complying with the commitments acquired as regards resettlement and approval of an ambitious, permanent resettlement programme following the example of countries such as Canada.

4. Removal of obstacles to access the right of asylum:

- Putting an end to illegal push-backs of migrants and refugees on the borders of Ceuta and Melilla.
- Removal of the need for an airport transit visa imposed in 2011 on people of Syrian nationality..

5. The immediate transposition of European directives on asylum and urgent approval of the regulations that apply the rules of the Law of Asylum, which has been pending for nearly seven years.



Greece has become a huge refugee camp.
For months, thousands of people were settled in Idomeni.
© ACNUR / Achilleas Zavallis.



We present our fourteenth annual report at a crucial time for the right to asylum in Spain and in the European Union. In 2015, the worsening conflict in Syria five years after it began obliged hundreds of thousands of people to seek a safe home on our continent. However, since it was impossible to come by legal avenues, they had to risk their lives on the Mediterranean, above all on routes to Turkey and Greece across the Aegean Sea. In that corner of the world, the island of Lesbos is “ground zero” today for the right to asylum in Europe, as described in the devastating report from a recent mission by CEAR that we include in these pages.

Over the last year, thousands of Europeans have rallied to demand that the European Union and governments of the member states roll out a true reception policy once and for all, as well as an asylum policy based on the values and principles that the EU recognises as its

foundational ones. It seems that a change was glimpsed last summer, above all after the publication of the photo of little Aylan dead on a beach; a terrible image that shook the world by portraying the extreme drama of Syria. European leaders then proposed relocating and resettling 180,000 refugees. However, these measures are being put into practice very slowly [...]

The threat of xenophobia and racism is spreading, as shown by the sustained advance of the extreme right in France, Belgium and Austria, as well the severe involution of asylum policies in Hungary. Meanwhile, European leaders continue to close the doors to refugees and migrants by making Europe’s southern and eastern borders impermeable and by signing agreements such as the one in March with Turkey, which marks a clear breach of human rights and which CEAR has denounced before the European Commission, the European Ombudsman and the European Commissioner for Human Rights.

From the Prologue by Carlos Berzosa, president of CEAR