

The Migrant Crisis Presents a Moral Dilemma

During the three-day Memorial Day weekend, as Americans grilled meat and sipped ice-cold beer and Coca-Cola, [more than 700 migrants from Africa died](#) when their unseaworthy boats sank in the Mediterranean Sea on the way to Europe.

Although a U.N. official named in the linked article called that “a very intense and exceptional week for the number of fatalities,” the death toll this year for people trying to get to Europe by that route has now topped 2,000. Fortunately, that’s a mere fraction of those who make it. But not everybody can be saved.

The migrant problem faced by Italy and the EU generally—especially Germany, which has absorbed more than a million migrants fleeing the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan—has sparked a debate even more passionate than the American one about Mexican and other South American “illegals.” The debate takes the form of a moral dilemma for a part of the world that prides itself on its humanistic values.

On one hand, hardly anyone wants to see desperate and mostly innocent people dying on the seas. On the other hand, the West does not have a limitless capacity to absorb uninvited immigrants. Nobody does, and nobody can reasonably be expected to act as though they do.

So we can’t help all of them. But if we commit to helping only some, we leave the rest to the mercy of [the human-traffickers who take advantage of their desperation](#). And the death toll will continue to mount.

Not a few people have proposed solving the problem at its source by using military forces to shut down the culprits’ operations along the North African coastline. To great

fanfare, the EU [began](#) such an effort about a year ago. But the effort has had only limited success; the culprits can often wait it out in hiding, or shift their operations to uncovered areas. Getting them all would require a far greater commitment of resources, and a willingness to accept some casualties, that the EU countries have so far not shown.

The ultimate source of the problem may well be intractable. The migrants currently crossing the Mediterranean in search of a better life are mostly Africans from countries that are poor, corrupt, and often riven by conflict. They know that if they make it to Europe or America, they will usually be treated better than they are in their own countries.

It was a bit different, but not entirely so, when the EU was grappling with the Middle-Eastern migrant problem last year. Those migrants came mostly from countries that had become almost impossible to live in because of war; and for mostly political reasons, the oil-rich Muslim countries on the Gulf refused to admit most of them—though some of the sheikhs and princes helped bankroll [Jordan's considerable effort](#) to handle Syrian refugees.

The mostly Muslim Middle-Eastern migrants knew they could usually expect a better reception from the “infidels” than from their fellow Muslims, which may explain the growing phenomenon of Muslims converting to Christianity (see, e.g., [here](#) and [here](#)).

The reality is there is no neat solution to the dilemma that would not involve hardening our hearts to people who are only doing what we ourselves would do in similar circumstances. Some problems can only be limited, not solved.

Watch the video below for a good example of how the crisis is sparking anger and passionate debate abroad.

[Main Image Credit: Youtube/BBC]