

THURSDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2016

Members present

Rt Hon the Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Lord Balfe
Baroness Coussins
Lord Horam
Earl of Oxford and Asquith
Lord Risby
Baroness Suttie
Lord Triesman
Lord Tugendhat (Chairman)

Examination of Witnesses

Mr Steve Symonds, Refugee and Migrant Rights Programme Director, Amnesty International UK, and **Dr Natalie Roberts**, Adviser on Refugees and Migration in Europe, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)

Q1 The Chairman: Good morning, Dr Roberts and Mr Symonds. First of all, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to come before us. As I think you probably know, this is the first hearing of a new inquiry that the Committee is doing into Operation Sophia. It will be quite a short inquiry, and we hope to produce something that is reasonably relevant and to the point after a short number of hearings. It seemed appropriate to start with organisations such as yours and we are very glad that you are here. We sent you a number of questions. There are not very many, because as the subject is unfamiliar to us there will be a number of supplementaries, and people will want to go widely beyond the questions we have asked. I will kick off with a very straightforward question.

Can you explain to us the current migration and refugee routes through Europe? How do you think they are likely to change during the coming year? Can you give us any idea of what you think the current and future volumes are likely to be through the central Mediterranean? As it happens, I had lunch yesterday with a central European ambassador. His view was that, because the Macedonian frontier will be pretty effectively closed, the pressure on the central Mediterranean route was likely to increase.

Dr Natalie Roberts: There are three main routes through the Mediterranean. There is the eastern route, which is from Turkey to Greece across the Aegean. There is the central route, which is from north Africa to Italy, usually Libya to Italy. Then there is the western route,

which runs from Morocco to Spain. From UNHCR data, last year 1,008,000 people came across by sea to Europe—851,000 of them on the eastern route and 153,000 via the central route.

The Chairman: Can you repeat those figures?

Dr Natalie Roberts: There were 851,000 who came across the eastern route, from Turkey to Greece, and 153,000 came across the central route, from Libya to Italy. So far this year—it is obviously quite early in the year—102,000 people have already crossed on the eastern route and about 8,000 on the central route that we know of. Again, that is from UNHCR data. Very few people now cross on the western route from Morocco to Spain; there have been only about 450 this year. During 2015 we saw a switch towards the eastern route—the route from Turkey to Greece—mainly because the majority of people crossing were Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans, so that is the direction from which they come. They reach Europe through Greece and progress through the Balkans along the central European route. Eritreans, Somalis and sub-Saharan Africans take the central route more, along with some Syrians. The Syrians, when they first started taking the routes, often went to Libya and crossed that way, but the majority now go through Turkey.

We have observed an increase in numbers and countries of origin of people coming from west Africa who used to take the route to Spain, but now, because that is very difficult, they go as far as Libya and take the central Mediterranean route. The central route is a lot longer and thus more dangerous than the eastern route. It takes between 30 and 74 hours to cross from Libya to Italy on the central route. It only takes between 45 minutes and a maximum of a few hours to cross from Turkey to Greece. This makes it is much more dangerous to take the central route.

The routes themselves are quite fluid. They change depending on the potential for the onward journey. This is not so much about the weather. Although the numbers declined a bit in the winter, they have not decreased seasonally as much as we, or anyone, expected, as demonstrated by the fact that even in winter 8,000 people crossed on the dangerous central route.

Most of the informants we discuss it with share the same concerns: because the eastern route might have blockages further up in the Balkans, more people will start switching back to the central Mediterranean route, so they will start coming from Libya to Italy. In particular, we are worried about negotiations between the EU and Turkey, and the closure of the border between Macedonia and Greece, and further up all the way to Austria. People know very quickly when borders are closed. They choose not to take that route and they switch to another direction. We certainly know that if one route closes, another one opens. It is not a case of closing down all the routes.

The situation in Libya is very relevant for us. We have teams working in Libya. They report increasing instability. There are very difficult and dangerous transits for people through the country and there is no capacity in Libya to support refugees who are there on the ground. The refugees we have rescued and people we meet in Libya universally complain that they are subjected to violence and abuse in Libya, and that they only go that way because they see no option. They often get stuck in Libya for a bit more time because of the weather. If they are there in the winter, they will not make the crossing until the weather is calmer. They are sometimes stuck in Libya for weeks or months. We are very concerned about that situation.

The Chairman: That was very comprehensive. Is there anything you would like to add, Mr Symonds?

Mr Steve Symonds: I will not repeat that. It certainly accords with our analysis and understanding of the situation. There are a couple of things, perhaps touching on the question you asked about predictions for the future and the numbers of people we expect. Obviously none of us is in a position to give a clear prediction, but it is useful to look backwards and think about how we arrived at this point, with those numbers. That may give us an indication of how we might assess what will happen going forward.

In that slightly bigger picture, it is important to recognise that the global refugee population has been growing for the last three years at a pretty alarming rate, much larger than the rate of arrivals in Europe. For example, at the end of 2013 there were 10.5 million refugees globally. Midway through last year that number had gone up to over 15 million refugees. We expect that it is still growing. The reason is that the conflicts on which we report and research, and persecution elsewhere, have been spreading in an arc from Afghanistan, all the way through the Middle East, to sub-Saharan Africa and indeed to west Africa. Those situations are becoming more protracted and intractable and they are spreading, so we have an increased number of refugees.

The second aspect that is critical to understanding why Europe is experiencing what it is at the moment is that in the decade leading up to that rise, while the total number of refugees remained relatively stable, the proportion of refugees hosted by the developing world rose at an alarming rate. In the middle of the 1990s, the developing world was hosting a still very remarkable 70% of all the world's refugees; by the time we got to the end of 2013 that had risen to 86%. The capacity for those countries—many of them not just poor but lacking stability themselves—to absorb new arrivals is very weak. Of course, we see that very particularly, but not only, in relation to the Syrian crisis.

There is one aspect that is always worth highlighting; the figures I have given about the total numbers of refugees actually misrepresent the true situation, because they leave out what until very recently was certainly the largest refugee population by national origin—Palestinians. They are often not included because they do not fall within the remit of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Most of the more than 5 million Palestinian refugees are registered in three countries. Syria is one—many of them are refugees themselves displaced from Syria—but the other two are Lebanon and Jordan. Jordan is hosting 2 million Palestinian refugees, so in considering the particular impact on Lebanon and Jordan of the current crisis we have to factor in the enormous responsibility that those two countries have been sharing for decades in hosting refugee populations. The pressure for people to move on is increasing because the situations they have immediately fled to have become increasingly unsustainable over a long period.

The Chairman: I have two supplementary questions. Dr Roberts said that migrants and refugees are very well informed; they know that when one frontier closes they need to go somewhere else. One of the mysteries to me is this. I quite see that if you have been caught up in the Syrian war you are in a desperate situation, and there are others who are in a desperate situation too, but by no means are all of them in desperate situations. When people look at the hazards of crossing the water, and when they know from their iPhone that the Macedonian frontier is closed and that, far from reaching Germany, Sweden, Finland or wherever they want to go, they are going to be cooped up in some dreadful camp in a country they have not previously heard of and whose language they do not speak, why does that not deter some people from making the trip? Are we in a Pied Piper situation that has developed a momentum of its own even for people who are not desperate?

Dr Natalie Roberts: I would argue that the majority of people are very desperate. We know that 84% of the people who came to Europe last year are from refugee-producing countries, so

those people really are desperate, particularly the Syrian population. They have reached the point now where they see no option.

As regards the onward journey, yes, they are aware that the border in Macedonia is closed, but, as we said, when one route closes another one opens. These people tend to be so desperate that they are very prone to rumours and the information that comes from smugglers, for example. The smuggling industry has developed around rumours and promises. They may hear that the border is closed, but they will find somewhere else and someone will say, “It is okay. This border is closed but we can take you through another way; there is another way to go”. Each time it is like an onward step: “Just make the next little step and then we will get you where you want to go”.

When people are in those desperate situations—the majority of people really feel that it is their last option and their last step—they are very vulnerable to being promised things and they think, “Well, at least if I can make that jump and at least get to Greece, we will see where we go from there”. Then from Greece maybe they will have to do something and something will happen. There is still a shred of optimism among people. They do not want to sit and be vulnerable victims inside Syria or in a camp around Syria. It is the same for Afghanistan or Iraq. They are trying to take their lives in their own hands and make a positive decision for themselves and their families. They are very open to suggestions that there is some way through and some hope. Obviously, as people manage to get to the end point, they have family, friends and contacts in Germany, France, the UK or Sweden, so there is also a strong desire to join their families. They are willing to try, even when they know the borders are closed.

Q2 Baroness Coussins: On the Amnesty website it is claimed that there has been a sharp rise in deadly shipwrecks, and that that is attributable to the end of Mare Nostrum and the switch to Operation Sophia. On the other hand, the UK Government told us that up to January this year 8,000 lives were saved at sea. Can you explain to us the evidence for the sharp rise in deadly shipwrecks and whether you still hold to that opinion?

Mr Steve Symonds: Yes, of course. I will take you through the timeline of the various operations that have changed, because that is very important to understand what is on our website. I am sorry that clearly that has not been well communicated to you and that there is a bit of misunderstanding as to what exactly is being said there.

We had Operation Mare Nostrum, as you say, right the way through from October 2013, and it came to an end in November 2014, although the Italians continued to phase it out right until the end of that year. In November 2014, Operation Mare Nostrum was replaced by something called Operation Triton. That was an EU FRONTEX operation—a particular border security operation. It operated in Italian waters; about 30 nautical miles off the Italian coast was as far as it operated. The equipment that it used was essentially coast-patrolling vessels to intercept and police the border. That continued all the way until the end of April 2015. The piece that you have seen on the website was put up around that time, and it is part of a timeline story that is obviously being continued.

We were extremely critical of what had happened, because essentially there had been a move from the search and rescue mission which the Italians had been operating, which was hugely more resourced and resourced with technical ships designed to be able to rescue people at sea, to a much smaller mission that was simply designed to do border policing at sea. The ships were also positioned miles away from where the shipwrecks were happening. That was a critical thing about the Italian mission: it operated deep in international water, so it could get to shipwrecks relatively quickly.

Around that time, in the first four months of 2015, 53,000 people made the crossing compared with 32,000 for the same four months in the previous year. We continued to see a significant rise in the number of people attempting to make the crossing, but we also saw a huge rise in the number of people drowned at sea. In mid-April, when I think that quote probably went up on the website, we published a report called *Europe's Sinking Shame*, where we compared the data from the current year with the previous year—2014. At that point we highlighted the fact that 17 people had drowned in one period in 2014 and 900 people had drowned in the same period in 2015. Within virtually a week of our publication, that figure had been added to by more than 1,000 deaths.

That prompted the EU to have an emergency summit meeting, and it agreed to reinstate search and rescue in international waters, which is what it has done. Operation Sophia is partly a renaming of the operation that has taken place since May 2015. It is also a slight change of focus for that operation. Fundamentally, we have not criticised the search and rescue effort of the EU in the central Mediterranean since May 2015. It has largely met the effort the Italians were making by themselves in relation to the quantity of vessels and the design of equipment that is being targeted there. It is operating in waters close enough to save lives. People still drown, but it is none the less an effective search and rescue mission.

We have been concerned about the change of emphasis for that mission, certainly with the renaming of Operation Sophia, to become more targeted at tackling smugglers directly. We are concerned that the change of focus might undermine the search and rescue mission per se, and about something that Natalie touched on, which is that what has not been addressed is either why people are finding themselves in Libya in the first place or the horrendous conditions in Libya, which we have also reported on, in particular for foreign nationals caught up in the awful and still escalating conflict there. Essentially, you risk trapping people in a place that is extremely dangerous for them. If that is all you have done, you are not saving lives. If you do not have an answer to the situation of those people, we are sceptical about the mere targeting of the smugglers. From about May 2015, we have welcomed the search and rescue effort; it has effectively replaced what the Italians were doing. That is a good thing.

Dr Natalie Roberts: I will explain MSF's role in search and rescue. It was the gap in search and rescue facilities that prompted MSF to decide to launch search and rescue boats. We have never done that before. In April 2015, when there was no effective search and rescue in the Mediterranean—we noted that in 2014 there were 50 deaths in that month—the number of deaths was 1,308. At that point we decided to launch our own search and rescue campaign. We launched three boats that ran between May and December 2015. Our three boats rescued 23,747 people. We rescued 123 boats in distress. With the increase in search and rescue, the number of deaths started to go down. We never had the peak of April. In total, last year 3,771 deaths in the Mediterranean were confirmed by UNHCR, which is higher than in any previous recorded year. We really feel that a lot of that was due to the gap in search and rescue capability between January and May.

We would be very concerned that a move away from search and rescue would lead to much higher death rates at sea. Search and rescue cannot completely prevent all shipwrecks, but you need sufficient ability to respond in a timely manner to vessels in distress. MSF had to come in and do that in May last year. We would rather not have to continue those operations if they could be continued by the EU and other organisations.

Q3 Lord Risby: The demand factors as to why people are doing this are very clear. Could we look at the push factors for a moment? The third Phase of the operation includes the apprehension of smugglers and dealing with the vessels involved in smuggling. From a purely functional point of view, how is that likely to work? I imagine that it is very difficult to

identify which vessels are being used for smuggling, fishing boats et cetera, so that is the first thing. What does destruction mean, and what would it mean in practice? Of course, leading up to that is the apprehension of smugglers. It is a very sophisticated operation. Obviously large sums of money are being paid to those individuals, but is there an identifiable pattern among the smuggling groups? It would be very interesting for the Committee to understand that.

Mr Steve Symonds: What we know about the smuggling networks is relatively limited, to be honest, but we certainly know some things. There are highly complex networks of smuggling activity and they happen at all sorts of levels. There are certainly people who sit at the top of a big chain of loose connections, who are no doubt making huge profits and probably go nowhere near anyone they are smuggling. They go all the way down to individuals who may have a boat or a property where they could house people, or they happen to live in the area and can escort people across a particular border, so they will be bought in. The exchange of money may go through several hands. People pass through several hands as well and, indeed, may pass through several different smugglers' networks along the way.

One of the difficulties in tackling smuggling networks is that much of the activity inevitably ends up being targeted at the people right at the bottom, many of whom might be willing to take some money to host people overnight, take people across a border or give up their fishing boat—or whatever boat it is—maybe because they are poor or have certain needs themselves that they want to meet. That is not tackling the smuggling network itself; that still exists.

There is a real problem in how you go about tackling that. The Committee may want to look back at the evidence that was given before the Home Affairs Sub-Committee. The sub-committee took evidence from the director of Europol, who is responsible for Europe's response to tackle people smuggling. One of the things he made clear in his evidence was that making a meaningful impact on such a convoluted and complex situation was certainly going to take until May 2020. That was the term of the actual plan he had been given. That is to do with, first, how little we know—he was relatively frank about the difficulties of knowledge—and, secondly, the complexity of how it works.

The other important thing is that the action plan that he was talking about makes it clear, although it does not give great detail, that if you really want to tackle people smuggling you have to remove the market for smugglers. You cannot remove the market for smugglers if there are no safe and legal routes for people who are desperate and who are going to make those journeys. Without safe and legal routes, you sustain the smugglers' markets, or indeed you grow them; they are now so complex and those complexities are so well developed—as Natalie said, the routes are ever changing, whether they be small or large changes—that the idea that you can simply close down a particular route seems largely fanciful to us.

Dr Natalie Roberts: I have nothing much more to contribute to Steve's points because we pretty much agree, but I have a technical answer about how to identify a smuggler's boat. We are not experts on that—MSF is a medical humanitarian organisation—but we recorded that of 123 boats we rescued last year in our search and rescue operations, 95 were inflatable dinghies but 28 were wooden fishing boats. Obviously that does not mean that the same proportion of boats are making the crossing; it may be that, as dinghies are so much more unsafe, more needed to be rescued, but we know that a significant number of wooden fishing boats are used on the migration route.

Q4 Lord Risby: I have a supplementary question. I hope you do not mind if it goes just a little bit away from the operation itself. Both of you obviously have a great grasp of the statistics of migration and it has been fascinating for us to hear those. I want to ask about other surrounding countries that tell us they are taking refugees, yet there is some controversy.

The Egyptians tell us that they are taking 500,000. The Saudis say that they are taking 2.5 million and even the Gulf states say that. In your experience, is that actually true?

Dr Natalie Roberts: I do not want to comment necessarily on Egypt or Saudi in particular, or many of the Gulf states, because we do not have our own operations there. As we do not have people on the ground it is very difficult for us to say. We have people on the ground in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon and we can see their efforts, but for Egypt and Saudi I would not say.

Mr Steve Symonds: I can say a little about that. There may be a distinction between Egypt and Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf states. The Gulf states and Saudi Arabia are saying, as I understand it, that they already have a significantly large Syrian worker population. They include them in the numbers they are referring to. That may not be entirely unreasonable; after all, workers sometimes go for temporary periods, and if they are not going home and are able to stay, that is a way of providing essential safety and protection for somebody.

It is very difficult to comment on the precise numbers. I have some doubts about some of the figures that have been mentioned, but it is certainly clear that the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia have not agreed to partake in any resettlement of Syrians. Egypt is in a slightly different situation. Broadly speaking, Egypt is one of the countries surrounding the conflict and has received significant numbers of Syrians fleeing there directly. We tend to talk about Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan for obvious reasons, because the volumes of Syrians they have been hosting for the last few years are very large, but, originally, Iraq and Egypt were always included when looking at the numbers, because there were a substantial number there. Certainly a few hundred thousand Syrians had sought safety in Egypt and Iraq. It is not clear whether that population is in any sense growing. Egypt would now appear to be, if anything, more a transit country. Certainly one of the things that Egypt has done is introduce visa requirements for Syria, something that many other countries have done too, as a means of trying to stop Syrians being able to get into the country.

Q5 Lord Triesman: I was very struck by the description of the flexibility of the logistics for moving people. It reminded me of how the routes for getting cocaine out of South America kept adapting to whatever the circumstances were. Is there any evidence that the core criminals—the ones higher up the chain, as you described—are using the same routes they move drugs along? Is it part of a broader form of criminality that adapts to what it is moving?

Mr Steve Symonds: I would not want to claim special expertise on those questions, but it is certainly our impression that many of those at the higher end of the chain will have been engaged in all sorts of other movements, many illicit, whether drugs, arms, et cetera. No doubt some of the routes were used, or perhaps are still being used, for the movement of other items of profit by the people who make that their business. Clearly, moving people has become a particularly profitable business at this time because of demand, but I have no doubt that people at certain levels in this complex chain will be engaged in moving not just people but the other items you touched on.

Q6 Earl of Oxford and Asquith: You say that the smugglers' market will continue to exist—I am sure you are right—as long as there are no safe and legal routes. Leaving aside the political aspect of that, what in your mind would be a model for a safe and legal route?

Mr Steve Symonds: There are various options. In our advocacy, we have focused particularly on three, which I will talk through. One is an option that is currently being used, albeit on a very modest scale, and that is resettlement. When I say a very modest scale, I am not just talking about the UK, although I would regard that as relatively modest too, but elsewhere in

Europe. For many countries, resettlement is much smaller than even the UK effort. I would not say that about Germany, which has a much bigger resettlement commitment. Of course, the UK commitment, like many others, is very much geared towards Syrians. The UK resettlement programme is tiny in respect of any other refugee population. The Nordic countries have a greater history of resettlement. Resettlement is not a bad option. It is worth noting that last year, I think, UNHCR identified 400,000 people in urgent need of resettlement. Globally, we are nowhere near meeting anything like that.

Another option on which we have recently focused a lot of our advocacy is family reunion. Many of the people we come across on these routes are trying to join family members, including European and British citizens. Only a week or so ago I met a British family with a baby living in Dunkirk, but the wife is a refugee and cannot get a visa, or has not managed to find a way to do that. Looking at family reunion opportunities for British citizens and other people settled here, for other refugees to be able to sponsor and host their family members, would be useful.

Another less developed option—France and Brazil have done it a little—is the granting of humanitarian visas to people to come to claim asylum. Brazil has issued about 8,000 such visas. We have never done anything like that.

There is a range of options. The advantages are twofold. They remove the market for the smugglers and therefore the compulsion to make dangerous journeys, but they are also an ordered way for states to receive refugees. We would strongly argue that some of the chaos Europe is experiencing is what it elected to have by choosing chaotic rather than organised routes to receive refugees.

Q7 Lord Horam: Turning to Operation Sophia, you described clearly that there was quite a good Italian search and rescue operation. Then it got rather bad because ships were withdrawn and it was rather chaotic, and now it is back up to a similar level of search and rescue effectiveness and so forth. That is looking at it from a search and rescue point of view. To what extent is Operation Sophia a deterrent to people trying to get across by the central route from Libya? You described how you think there may be a shift from the eastern route, which is very difficult but shorter and less dangerous, to the central route as a consequence of the closure of frontiers on the eastern border.

Mr Steve Symonds: Our analysis of the history of European efforts over the past few years to build stronger policing of Europe's external borders is that all you have effected is the movement of ever larger numbers of people around different routes by different journeys, usually at greater danger and cost to them, so of greater profit to smugglers. We do not see operations like Operation Sophia as a deterrent. They may deter a smuggler from taking a particular route, but that is not the same as deterring either the smuggler from taking a route or the people being smuggled from turning to the smuggler in search of a route. Fundamentally, to address people's movement you have to get back to addressing its root causes, and that is largely about conflict in the arc I talked about. That is long-term work.

Lord Horam: Looking at the fundamentals, are we really talking about getting proper governance in the seemingly democratic bit, in Benghazi and so forth? As we know, there are political efforts to get that working more properly than it has in the past. Are we talking about getting some sort of political settlement in Libya?

Mr Steve Symonds: If you could get a political settlement in Libya, it would at least allay the situation of many migrants in that country, or it would have the potential to do so, but it depends on the basis for the settlement. One of our concerns about the way in which Europe generally has gone about its external relations with countries like Libya, and many of the sub-

Saharan countries too, in trying to address the movement of people, is that at times there has been a significant degree of both political and financial support to countries to try to stop movement, but no commensurate effort to try to improve respect for human rights, recognition of asylum responsibilities or capacity to provide asylum. Essentially, you are creating more and more problems along greater expanses of the routes.

Lord Horam: Short of any improvement in the political situation in Libya, is there anything that can be done other than what is being done by Operation Sophia? Is there any way in which that can be made more effective, either by better search and rescue operations or more deterrence in the sense that fewer people take that route because they think it is dangerous?

Mr Steve Symonds: The focus on Libya is misguided. Libya is not a root cause; it is an awful additional problem and harm to many of the people who take that route. It is not a cause.

Lord Horam: What I am trying to get at is whether, short of a global solution to these problems, there is anything over and above an enhanced Operation Sophia that you could do in the short term.

Mr Steve Symonds: The thing you could do in the short term, politically unattractive though it may be, is establish safe and legal routes and identify ways by which people can find safety in Europe. Europe is not receiving a disproportionate number of the world's refugees.

Lord Horam: You are talking about the resettlement examples you gave.

Mr Steve Symonds: It could be resettlement, family reunion or humanitarian visas. That would reduce the smugglers' market. It would then make sense to try to tackle the smugglers directly and have no truck with them, but you need to tackle their market. In the longer term, yes, you will have to work towards resolving some of the crises in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan. I agree that it will not happen any time soon, but that work needs to be done.

Q8 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: The other day some of us had a meeting with the Minister for Europe. He said that the British Government would say that we need to support people in the region and that therefore their money and effort goes into the camps in the region. Dr Roberts made a comment about the camps earlier. Can you let us know whether the effort being made in the camps is working and is worthwhile, and your view of how that should progress? I am not saying whether or not I support the policy. I am just asking for your view.

Dr Natalie Roberts: We welcome efforts to provide economic support to the countries around Syria in particular, or in other countries to which refugees come as a first port of call. We have been very concerned that the intention behind that is to contain refugees in the area and prevent them from entering Europe, rather than support for the countries. For example, the effort to support Syria and surrounding countries via humanitarian aid, which was part of the recent Syria conference, should not replace the immediate need to increase the number of places for resettlement in Europe. It should be a coherent effort rather than a disjointed one where we do not help people who have already fled to Europe, or who want to flee to Europe, but give money to the countries surrounding Syria and they manage everything there. Obviously, economic help for those camps will be of use. We saw last year in the large camps in Jordan that the UN effort was completely underfunded. The World Food Programme (WFP) said that it would not have enough money to provide food for the refugees living in the camps. At the time, refugees were not allowed to work so they could not make their own money to buy food. Any economic support there is welcome, but we want to ensure that it is not an either/or option—that it is not, “Okay, we’re going to support the areas around Syria,

which means that we don't have to take on our responsibilities towards the refugees and the migration routes".

Q9 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Do you have any evidence about what the will of the refugees would be, and whether they could have a decent experience there rather than come to Europe?

Dr Natalie Roberts: We have spoken to many refugees. We have programmes in refugee-accepting countries, such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Some people are happy to stay there because it is close to Syria, and they still have some optimism that they will be able to go home. The same goes for other countries like Pakistan. Many countries accept refugees. Universally, people express pessimism that the conflict will finish soon. In particular, Afghan, Iraqi and increasingly Syrian refugees feel that the situation will never get better. They are very reluctant to sit in a camp in limbo where they are very much treated as victims. They may be given shelter and food, but it is very difficult to build a life; it is very much a limbo scenario. All refugee camps are pretty much the same. It is a waiting game. Without support to refugees to have their own agency, to be able to start careers, education and work, there is no way people are willing to stay. It is very demeaning. To take Syrians as one example, they were living in a very developed society. I spent a lot of time in Syria in 2012 and 2013. What was most shocking to people was how their lives had changed. They had gone from a very modern lifestyle to sleeping with their family in a tent in Turkey or Jordan, on the borders of Syria. These are very educated people. I met many doctors, architects and lawyers who felt very demeaned by what had happened to them. They are seeking to be real people again and for their families to have opportunities.

Mr Steve Symonds: I very much agree with what Natalie said. It is also very important to recognise that the great majority of refugees in those neighbouring countries are not in camps; most are living in fairly irregular situations in communities. They are hard to reach and it is hard to assess how vulnerable they may be. I mentioned Jordan and Lebanon. Because of their history of hosting over some years what has already become a very large permanent refugee population, those countries have some reservations, looking at Syria and the prospect of what is about to happen, or is happening, to them. We have seen increasingly over recent months or slightly longer the refusal to register new arrivals and recognise them as refugees. That has certainly been Lebanon's response for the best part of a year now. In recent months, both Jordan and Turkey have refused to allow tens of thousands of people to escape from Syria, and men, women, children, the elderly and the infirm are living in atrocious conditions at the borders. As Europe increasingly says that it wants to close its borders to, say, Turkey, there is a knock-on effect. We have seen Turkey forcibly removing refugees back to Syria and Iraq, and stopping people who would be refugees if they could get out.

We come back to your central question. It cannot be an either/or. If it is an either/or, it will not work. The other reason why the either/or will not work is that although Europe is not experiencing something that is disproportionate to many places elsewhere, it is experiencing something that is new to Europe, and many countries in Europe are finding that politically difficult to address. If some of us do not partake in sharing responsibility for what is happening in Europe at this time, it makes it increasingly hard to reach European consensus and have a collective response even to the refugees we have already seen arriving.

Q10 Baroness Suttie: I had a meeting yesterday with two Tunisian MPs who were extremely concerned about the number of Libyan refugees currently in Tunisia, which is a relatively stable country at the moment. They said that there were two million Libyan refugees in Tunisia, and that the Tunisian state was not funding them primarily because the money was

coming from within Libya and they were worried that it would be cut off. Is that an accurate description? What is your experience of what is actually happening in Tunisia?

Dr Natalie Roberts: We have a team on the ground in Tunisia looking at that at the moment. It has not yet come back to us with clear information. As you say, it is quite difficult to understand the situation. We have had clear warning signs that within Libya the situation is becoming unsustainable for many people, not just those transiting through Libya but Libyans themselves. There is a real sensation in our organisation that we expect increasingly to see Libyans on the boats. It would not be very surprising that they were moving to Tunisia. It is quite surprising that more of them are not migrating to Europe. We do not have any more detail about how Tunisia is hosting the refugees.

Q11 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: The EU Council decision on Operation Sophia does not explain what will happen to smugglers and traffickers once they have been apprehended. Lots of people are saying different things, but what is your view? In a sense you have begun to answer that, but we would like you to expand it a little more.

Mr Steve Symonds: I can say a little more—I am not sure how much more. One of the concerns at the moment, not just in relation to Operation Sophia but generally in the European Union's developing response to smuggling routes and intercepting smugglers, or people who are regarded as smugglers, is about who actually gets targeted. We receive plenty of accounts suggesting that many of the people intercepted and believed to be smugglers are probably just refugees who have been nominated as the person who takes charge of the boat. There is a real risk that the activity is targeting completely the wrong person.

In addition, there is increasing concern that because of the sense of urgency in wanting to stop the movement of people, policy positions developed in Brussels and discussed by Member States to address smuggling risk becoming increasingly careless of the need to protect other people who are trying to aid, support and save lives at sea. We are starting to see more reports that volunteers and NGOs operating in waters to save lives are either feeling deterred from undertaking an effort to rescue a boat—one prominent story on those lines was highlighted quite recently—or being intimidated in their work by the authorities clearly seeking to deter their activity. There is a risk that we are in effect targeting the wrong people as regards who we think the smugglers are, and in our efforts to deter smuggling we are going even further and deterring or inhibiting vital search and rescue efforts being made by volunteers, members of staff from Natalie's organisation and others out there saving lives at the moment.

Q12 Baroness Suttie: You have already talked this morning about the importance of dealing with the root causes. Forgive me, this is an enormous question; it is a dissertation rather than an answer that you can give. What do you believe the EU should do to tackle some of the economic and political root causes of why people are moving in the first place? It is a huge question.

Mr Steve Symonds: I am our refugee and migrant rights expert, not our conflict resolution expert. I feel cautious about my expertise to answer such a large question. Perhaps a better answer—I hope this is not too unsatisfactory—would be to take your question away and provide you with something in writing that might give you more help on that, rather than speculating from my own particular background, which is probably not so helpful to the Committee.

Dr Natalie Roberts: From our point of view, it is a very large question. Earlier, we discussed how 84% of people arriving in Europe on these routes are from refugee-producing countries. Half of them are from Syria; 21% are from Afghanistan; and others come from Iraq, Eritrea,

Somalia and Sudan. Although each person's reason for wanting to reach Europe cannot be based exclusively on their country of origin, we are witnessing huge problems in those countries that need to be addressed urgently. How much power the EU has to address those politically is debatable. There needs to be a global effort to get to the bottom of it, particularly in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, which have incredibly long-standing problems. This is not a new crisis.

We want to point out, however, that each specific persecution claim by someone entering Europe and each person's need for protection has to be assessed individually; it is not just about the countries they are coming from, although it is very clear that the majority of people are running away from major conflicts. We are not optimistic that any addressing of these issues politically will be prompt. I doubt there will be an answer for Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia tomorrow. Even if there were, there would be a very long process of rebuilding those countries to a state where it would be acceptable for people to return home. Although trying to come to a solution for the major refugee-producing countries would be politically desirable, it does not mean that we should focus all our efforts on that and neglect our responsibilities to people who have already left, or who may continue to leave, even if there was a successful ceasefire in places like Syria. I do not know whether you have seen videos of the situation in Homs, for example. The entire city has been destroyed. Although some people may return to Homs, many others may say, "This is too big a job for me". Although the political situation in those countries has to be addressed urgently, it will be a long-standing effort.

Mr Steve Symonds: There is perhaps one thing that I can usefully say now in relation to the question. We very much endorse one of the findings of the International Development Committee, which looked particularly at the response to the Syrian crisis and refugees there: the Committee expressed the concern that if we do not manage to do much more to help relieve the pressure on countries such as Lebanon or Jordan, we risk the spread of conflict and instability. That is certainly something that we have seen. I talked about the history over the past few years. Iraq was a major host for Syrian refugees and it has become embroiled in the overspill of that conflict. Elsewhere, in sub-Saharan Africa, you can see how conflict has spread across borders. Part of the answer—it is not a complete answer and I will make sure I have something in writing for you—is recognising that not sharing responsibility for hosting refugees is itself a driver of growing instability and thus more refugee migration.

Q13 Lord Balfre: I raise two small points. First, part of the problem is to address the question that there is no great willingness, certainly in the area I come from, for many refugees to be rehoused in Britain. We may not like to face up to it, but it is a blunt fact. There is no great willingness. The second point is that most of the problem has been caused by us. Homs has not been destroyed by Syrians running round blowing up their own buildings. To an extent, when I look at these problems I often wonder to what extent we are reaping what we have sown.

Our final question is about the critical steps to be taken by the EU to address the political and economic root causes. Is not one of them that we should stop meddling? I do not expect a lot of support for that, but it is a point of view.

Mr Steve Symonds: Again, I am going to beg the privilege of thinking about that and what written response to give. I do not think that is a question for someone with my particular expertise and responsibility in my organisation to answer.

Lack of great willingness, however, certainly falls within my brief. I would say that the situation is mixed. For instance, on the UK response to Syrian resettlement, I have not been

exuberant in praising either the numbers or its speed, and I will not be, but in the UK's experience of resettlement it is a very substantial new commitment. We have seen enthusiasm for that right across the UK. That suggests to us that you need to be willing to explain what is going to happen, and engage local communities in what they are being asked to take part in. If you are willing to do that and explain the reasons, there is more scope than we thought there was for it to happen. We started from a position where, until January 2014, this country had committed to resettling nobody from the Syrian conflict. It is possible to change responses. The questions about how far and how fast you can do that are real, but there is also the question of the political will to do it. Unfortunately, the longer we leave it, the bigger the problems become, and from the politicians' perspective the more unwelcome they look and the less the willingness to address them.

The fact is that for many years we have not seen a particularly large refugee population coming to the UK, even in comparison with Europe, which is a continent that in comparison with most parts of Africa and the Middle East does not see anything like a disproportionate number of the world's refugees. They make up a very small proportion of the migration to Europe. With a bit more political will and hopefully more stirring from organisations like mine there is much more that we could do.

Q14 Lord Horam: Stepping back from the grander geopolitical realities or the questions Lord Balfe raised, and looking at this year, 2016, and Operation Sophia, you seem to be saying—it rather confirms what other people have said to us—that it has been more successful in saving lives than what came immediately before it. How far could it be extended to the eastern route? There has been some talk of that. For example, could Royal Navy ships, Italian ships or whatever be used to interdict boats coming from Turkey to Kos, Lesbos or wherever? I know they are much shorter distances and all the rest of it. I do not know whether it is practical, but I understand there is talk about it in the European Union. To what extent could that happen?

Dr Natalie Roberts: I think it could be done practically, if you are just talking about it in technical terms. MSF has teams working on that route in what we call an assistance programme. Rather than the big search and rescue ships that we use in the central Mediterranean, we are using smaller speedboats to respond to, usually, rubber dinghies in distress. We can go out to them—

Lord Horam: It is happening now.

Dr Natalie Roberts: MSF is running them at the moment, together with Greenpeace.

Lord Horam: But that is a voluntary organisation.

Dr Natalie Roberts: This is us—a humanitarian organisation. It has been very successful. We either tow boats back to Lesbos in Greece or we rescue people. Usually, it is just a case of providing assistance to get people there as quickly as we can. Technically, it is possible. I do not see why other organisations—Operation Sophia or anybody else—would not be capable of providing those services.

Lord Horam: Or the European Union.

Dr Natalie Roberts: Yes.

Q15 The Chairman: Could I raise a question that was not on the sheet and which is, I recognise, outside the responsibilities of each of you? It occurred to me during the course of questioning. When we look at what has happened to FIFA, it is very interesting to see how the American justice system was able to get a grip on the transmission of cash to various parts of

the FIFA empire. Lord Triesman knows more about this than I do. All these payments that have been going on for years have brought FIFA down because of the American banking and justice systems. In Iran, sanctions have been extremely successful, but overwhelmingly it is the financial sanctions that have been successful because of people's fear of crossing American justice and financial regulations. People smuggling is a cash business, if ever there was one, and very large amounts of cash must be involved. Something has to be done with that. It has to be put into banks and monetised in a useable fashion—I had not thought of this until you gave evidence. To your knowledge, are the European security services and others looking at the trafficking problem from that end? Has that come up in your world?

Dr Natalie Roberts: I am going to plead complete ignorance on this. As a medical humanitarian aid worker, I have absolutely no understanding of cash flows around any sort of business.

The Chairman: It is a cash-down business, is it not? You do not get on the dinghy unless you hand over the money.

Dr Natalie Roberts: There will be flows of cash. I do not understand where or how they move.

Mr Steve Symonds: I have here Europol's most recent report on migrant smuggling in the EU. On page 13, there is a section on illicit financial flows. The report is pretty brief, and this section is tiny, but it tells you, I am sure, that your question is the right one, but my assessment is that the capacity, understanding and knowledge to be able to tackle it, looking at this report, is very much lacking. I cannot say more than that. I am happy to point you in the direction of the report. I can leave it for you if you would like to have a look at it.

Lord Balfe: It would be very interesting to have a copy of that report.

The Chairman: I am sure the clerks will respond.

Dr Natalie Roberts: MSF produced a report about activities on the migrant routes in Europe last year: *Obstacle Course to Europe*. I will leave a few copies, if anyone wants to have a look. A lot of the data and figures are inside the report.

Q16 The Chairman: Could I ask just one more question about money? You may have an answer as you deal with the people concerned, or at any rate those who hand over the money. To your knowledge, do people have to give hard currency—dollars, euros and so on—or will they accept Syrian pounds and currency of that nature?

Dr Natalie Roberts: Very few people accept Syrian pounds, even in Syria. Last time I was there the dollar was increasingly becoming the currency. Generally, the currency is dollars, euros or even pounds. From Calais and Dunkirk, I hear that pounds are acceptable.

The Chairman: So there are people dealing in very large quantities of dollars.

Dr Natalie Roberts: Yes.

The Chairman: That occurred to me as a result of your very interesting evidence. Thank you very much.