

# Refugees fleeing their state drown in the Aegean Sea

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Syrian and Iraq refugees arrive at Lesbos, Greece with help from volunteers

Carilyn Pointer - Strong winds on the [Aegean Sea](#) contributed to the drowning of more than twenty people. Refugees from African countries, Syria, and Iran attempted to cross from Turkey to Greece in hopes to find safety. Understanding the role of nations and states expounds on the causes of this tragedy.

A [state](#) is a sovereign territory commonly referred to as a country. In contrast, [nations](#) are groups of people who share a common history and culture. These terms commonly get treated as the same thing, but in reality, are very different. By making the distinction between the terms, the different forces involved in this recent tragedy become clear and exemplify the importance the nation/state system has in all our lives. In the case of the refugees, they were fleeing their origin states because of violent conflicts over territory, national identity, and long-standing political differences. The problems at the state level have impacted them to the point that the perilous journey is safer than remaining in their state of origin. Their sense of national identity doesn't disappear though, so their sense of loyalty and identity remains tied to the state they left. Many try to just wait out the conflict hoping one day they can return home. Others try to rebuild their life in the new state, despite the struggles of learning a new language and having left their possessions and careers. By understanding the interaction between states and nations it becomes clear how people get caught in the middle of these relations amid conflict.

Furthering our awareness of [identity](#) in the context of refugees, continues to add meaning to the situation. It can sometimes be easy to only see these people as members of a state. In reality though, they are individuals who have complex identities that are intertwined with the state that is causing them harm, and the desire to seek a new identity in a host state.