explainity explained: Refugee crisis

Karim is one of almost 60 million refugees worldwide. That's equivalent to the population of Italy. The 17-year-old has fled from his native country. Thousands of kilometres, overland and by sea, without his family. He only knows he should go to Europe, preferably to Germany or Sweden. Suddenly he's at a frontier with a high fence. Why are the frontiers closed here? What's going on?
For weeks now, there have been stories like this in the media. The reports say Europe has a refugee crisis. In 2015 hundreds of thousands of people have fled from their native countries to Europe. Why exactly? Here are the key facts:

In the history of humanity there have repeatedly been major movements of refugees – fleeing from natural disasters, genocide or war.

Usually, for refugees outside Europe, there's no legal means of entry, because they can't get a visa. That's why they're ready to pay a lot of money to so-called facilitators, who promise to get them to Europe. In particular, the routes in overcrowded boats across the Mediterranean are dangerous and have cost many lives.

But who actually is a refugee? Refugees are people like Karim who believe they have no future in their own country and live in fear for their lives.

That's why the EU countries have laws of asylum. Asylum is Greek for home and means that refugees find shelter in politically stable countries. In Germany, a refugee or person entitled to asylum according to the German Constitution is someone who, in his or her country of origin, is politically persecuted by the state. In 1951, the United Nations adopted the Convention Relating to the status of Refugees, the first arrangement under international law for dealing with refugees. People are recognized as refugees if their life or freedom in their country of origin is threatened because of their race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group.

And why is there a crisis in Europe?
To put it briefly, the EU was not prepared for such a large influx of refugees. Besides that, there's still no uniform, EU-wide asylum system that regulates how many refugees each country accepts. According to the Dublin Regulation, asylum-seekers must apply for asylum in the country they arrive in first. But many of the countries of arrival are Mediterranean countries which are already facing a financial crisis. In some of them, conditions in the reception camps are catastrophic. That's why asylum-seekers move on to Sweden, Germany or Austria.

Applications for asylum are piling up, and the question of money, that is, who should bear how much of the cost, is debated time and again. There's an awful lot that needs to be settled! That's why the European Commission is thinking of establishing a distribution key for the number of refugees to be accepted by each country, based on population, economic strength, unemployment rate and the number of asylum-seekers accepted so far.

Karim has made it to Germany. He has submitted an application for asylum here and is now waiting for a decision. He dreams of a peaceful life free of fear, like many other refugees worldwide.