

《Spain prepares for new waves of refugees》

Spain has agreed to accept almost 18,000 refugees over the coming months. This is despite the Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy arguing for less given the country's high unemployment rate.

The sign is clear but soon, Spain will be judged on its actions. Critics already claim the country has been slow to accept its fair share of refugees.

A month ago, Spain looked to limit the intake to less than 3,000. That figure has since changed jumping to 17,680. It is a significant increase but local authorities are confident their facilities can handle it.

"Those refugees go through a reception process which covers everything - lodging and support - for six months at least, up to 24 months. That reception includes lodging, food, information, assessment, documentation, we give them refugee status and the authorization to work. The idea isn't that they are refugees forever depending on public bodies, but that little by little they find a job, a home and autonomy," Pablo Gomez-Tavira with Comunidad De Madrid said.

Other help comes in the form of drop-in canteens providing hot meals. Language courses, counseling and other support are also provided.

Spain though is just emerging from an economic crisis following a seven year recession. But unemployment remains stubbornly high at 22%.

Despite that, it would appear that the general public are on the whole behind efforts to accept greater numbers of refugees.

"Yes, yes. We've seen a feeling from the public that we haven't had before. Obviously the humanitarian crisis over the summer, and the media attention that the refugees' arrival has had, has touched the hearts of the public. And we're receiving spontaneous offers of help from the public, sometimes more than we can cope with. The truth is that hadn't happened before," Monica Lopez with Commission Espanola De Ayuda Al Refugiado said.

But there is a concern that attitude could quickly change once the refugees arrive and public sentiment subsides. And then there's the Europe-wide issue of what to do with the considerably larger group of refugees who are now in Europe as well as those still to arrive.

"Well what we are seeing is 500,000 people arrive through the Mediterranean and we have nearly three thousand deaths. So the numbers are really enormous, so we have to respond but in our opinion, the response is not as fast as it should be. So the mechanism in Europe is ongoing but it is not as fast as it should be," Maria Jesus Herrera with International Organization For Migration said.

In the meantime, Spain is preparing to open its doors, at least partially. Only then, can the country be judged as to

whether it really does welcome refugees.

