

Forum: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Issue: Strengthening refugee protection and asylum protection and asylum policies

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Introduction

There are 110 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, with over half of those coming from three of the same countries. Specifically, 52% of all refugees in the world come from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan by the end of 2022. Hence, the issue regarding strengthening refugee protection and asylum policies is one that is crucial to solve and is based upon multiple complexities. It is an intricate issue and encompasses various considerations and challenges. The changing nature of conflict, patterns of migration, and the range of needs faced by refugees demand a thorough analysis of our current approaches. The range of issues is massive, from complicated legal and procedural issues to socioeconomic factors negatively influencing displaced people's access to basic human rights. Furthermore, the urgency of this issue needs to be recognised and addressed by understanding that refugees share the same basic human needs as everyone else, and it is their right to have access to those needs. As shown at the start, only a few countries actually provide the majority of refugees, so focusing on those nations could be a way to more efficiently solve this issue. So, the house must find solutions that resonate with the evolving needs of those seeking refuge in an increasingly complex world.

Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Refugee:** a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.
2. **Asylum Seeker:** a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another.

3. **Asylum:** the protection granted by a state to someone who has left their home country as a political refugee.
4. **Non-refoulement:** the practice of not forcing refugees/asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution.
5. **Host Country:** The country that hosts refugees and asylum-seekers, usually for a prolonged time period, where refugees receive support and are protected.
6. **Migrant:** a person who moves to other places to find better employment of living conditions with the intent to stay temporarily
7. **Immigrant:** a person who moves to other places to find better employment of living conditions with the intent to stay permanently

Background Information

Refugees, Migrants, and Asylum seekers

When discussing this issue it is important to identify the distinction between refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. As outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, a refugee is, “a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him— or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.” Conversely, a migrant might leave their home country for a variety of reasons unrelated to persecution, such as employment, education, or family reunification. Even when travelling overseas, a migrant is still protected by their own country. Asylum seekers are people who escape their own country in search of safety in another country for asylum, which is the right to be treated as a refugee and granted financial aid and legal protection. An asylum seeker must show that they have a genuine fear of being persecuted in their home country. Furthermore, looking at the example of the Russia-Ukraine war, where millions of people have been displaced due to conflict, forcing them to migrate to other nations

and seek asylum. If their asylum is denied, then they will be forced to return to their unsafe nation, putting millions of lives at risk.

Global Compact on Refugees background

In the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, all the 193 Member States of the UN agreed that safeguarding individuals forced to flee and aiding the nations that provide them with refuge are shared international responsibilities. Building on the comprehensive framework for refugee response outlined in the New York Declaration (Annex I), the UNHCR was tasked with creating a new global compact on refugees in cooperation with States and other stakeholders. On December 17, 2018, the UN General Assembly formally confirmed the Global Compact on Refugees, the implementation of this new international framework and its potential to benefit both host and refugee communities.

1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

The aftermath of World War I (1914 - 1918) resulted in millions of people fleeing their home countries in search of refuge. The government's response to this tragedy was by setting up a set of international agreements in order to provide travel documents for those who were, efficaciously, the 20th-century first refugees. Both during and after World War II (1939 - 1945) their number increased significantly as millions more people were forcibly displaced, deported or resettled. In July 1951, a diplomatic conference was held in Geneva, which is known as the '1951 Refugee Convention'. Later, this was amended by the 1967 Protocol. These documents define a refugee, as well as the rights to social protection, other forms of aid, and legal protection. It outlines the duties that refugees have to their home countries and lists certain categories of individuals—like war criminals—who are ineligible for refugee status. The 1951 Convention's original purview was restricted to safeguarding post-World War II European refugees; but, as the issue of displacement extended globally, the 1967 Protocol broadened its scope of application.

Current Situation

The global refugee crisis has reached unprecedented levels, with millions of individuals forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses. In 2022, by the end of the year 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced.

The Syrian refugee crisis has had an immense impact, causing an enormous influx of refugees in search of safety and sanctuary in nearby nations and abroad. The Syrian refugee crisis, sparked by the civil war that began in 2011, involves millions of Syrians fleeing their homes due to violence and persecution. Displaced both internally and across borders, these refugees face immense humanitarian challenges, straining neighbouring countries and prompting international efforts to provide aid and resettlement support. People in the Middle East have been disproportionately impacted by this crisis, emphasising the regional dynamics and difficulties related to forced displacement. Due to the extent of forced migration, there is currently an unparalleled humanitarian crisis, with millions of people resettling in nearby nations in search of safety. The sheer volume of refugees has put tremendous strain on receiving nations and local populations, creating problems with infrastructure, economy, and society. To comprehend and counteract the detrimental material, emotional, and psychosocial effects of forced displacement, it is necessary to gain a greater awareness of the many impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the crisis, creating additional challenges to the working and living conditions of refugees in host countries such as Jordan. The pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities of refugee populations and the need for targeted interventions to address their unique circumstances

There is a growing need to develop managerial practices or consequences and policy implications for host country governments or organisations to recognize and utilise the unique contributions of refugees and embrace them as valued citizens. Understanding the ways in which refugees are framed in media coverage and the politics of immigration is crucial for addressing the challenges and misconceptions surrounding forced displacement. The scale of forced displacement presents complex challenges that require coordinated international responses, humanitarian assistance, and policy interventions.

Healthcare Access

One of the biggest problems refugees face is limited access to quality healthcare. Cultural issues, linguistic barriers, and stretched organisational structures are some of the challenges faced by refugees resettled in countries like Malaysia and the United States when trying to get healthcare treatments. The difficulties Syrian refugees in Turkey and other 3RP states face in accessing healthcare have been made worse by the COVID-19 outbreak. Women in refugee communities are more likely to have a variety of physical and mental health problems, making specialised healthcare measures even more necessary.

Employment Opportunities

Refugees often encounter barriers to securing employment, which can hinder their economic stability and integration into communities. These challenges may include unfamiliarity with local job markets, discriminatory practices, and limited recognition of foreign qualifications.

Vulnerabilities of Specific Groups

Vulnerable groups include women, children, and LGBTQ+ people. During the post-migration phase, LGBTQ+ refugees are especially vulnerable to minority pressures and mental health burdens, making targeted support and mental health services necessary. In addition, the special difficulties faced by disabled refugee children stress the necessity of inclusive policies and support networks in order to meet their educational and socioemotional requirements.

NGOs

The UNHCR has relations with over 900 partners, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The UNHCR has been collaborating with NGOs ever since it first began helping displaced persons in the 1950s. The size and work grew, enabling them to cope with several emerging refugee crises between the (1960s-1980s), largely in Asia, Africa, and Central America, and so did the committee's relations with a wide range of newly established refugee and humanitarian-related NGOs. This interconnected network continues to play a pivotal role in addressing the complex challenges of displacement on a global scale.

Global humanitarian platform's principles of partnership

All humanitarian groups are expected to adhere to common norms of equity, transparency, complementarity, and a results-oriented approach, as outlined in the Principles of Partnership issued by UNHCR in 2007 as part of the Global Humanitarian Platform. The 'Framework for Implementing with Partners' incorporates the Principles of Partnership as an institutional strategy for collaborative partnerships. The Global Humanitarian Platform's endorsement of the partnership principles on July 12, 2007, which places an emphasis on equity, transparency, responsibility, and complementarity.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International has been a proactive NGO advocate for immigrant and refugee rights. The group has worked to combat prejudice, safeguard their rights and deal with the non-refoulement issue. Amnesty International has also been recognised for its ability to influence public opinion and governmental decisions pertaining to refugee rights by swaying media coverage. This can be seen in the Nobel Peace Prize Amnesty International was awarded in 1977. The organisation's reports have brought attention to rights violations for refugees, including extended stays without end dates and persistent transgressions of the non-refoulement norm.

Refugees International

Refugees International has been dealing with refugee issues worldwide since 1979. The organisation has been a part of a larger network dealing with refugees, as can be seen by its role in addressing refugee concerns in specific regions such as Thailand. Displaying how the organisation is dedicated and actively working to address the conflicts that refugees encounter around the globe.

Humanity and Inclusion

Humanity and Inclusion is an NGO that has been actively involved in delivering mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities to low/middle-income countries, particularly after humanitarian emergencies such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. It is important to note that these are just *some* of the many NGOs, organisations, and bodies that work to help aid refugees, should there be a need to research other affiliated groups, delegates are reminded to conduct their own research.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Turkey

Turkey is a major country deeply involved in this issue, particularly in the context of hosting a significant number of refugees, notably from Syria. Turkey hosts the largest

refugee population in the world, at 3.4 million as of 2022, with Syrians constituting the majority of the refugee population. The country's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been pivotal, reflecting its commitment to providing refuge to those fleeing conflict. Turkey's aid towards Syrian refugees has allowed millions of Syrians to seek safety and protection within its borders. Turkey has faced numerous challenges, including providing access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The Turkish government has implemented various initiatives to address these challenges, such as the establishment of temporary education centres for refugee children and the introduction of work permits for Syrian refugees to access formal employment opportunities.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh hosts a large Rohingya refugee population, with the majority residing in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. The government of Bangladesh has faced numerous challenges in addressing the needs of Rohingya refugees, including limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Efforts have been made to provide essential services to the refugee population, including education initiatives for children and healthcare services. However, the scale of the crisis has strained resources and infrastructure, posing significant challenges to the well-being and integration of such refugees. This refugee crisis has also raised questions about repatriation and the long-term solutions for the refugee population. Bangladesh has engaged in discussions with Myanmar regarding the repatriation of these refugees. However, the complex nature of the crisis and the ongoing human rights challenges in Myanmar have posed significant obstacles to the repatriation efforts.

EU

The European Union (EU) holds significance in the issue of strengthening refugee protection and asylum policies by championing a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to ensure consistent standards across member states. Emphasising solidarity

and burden-sharing, the EU seeks fair distribution of responsibilities, evidenced by ongoing Dublin Regulation reforms. Committed to safe and legal pathways, the EU supports resettlement programs and humanitarian admission initiatives.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- **Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, July 1951**

- The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol have played a crucial role in shaping international refugee law, expanding protection beyond original temporal and geographic limitations. These agreements have broadened the scope of individuals eligible for refugee status, providing a clear definition and establishing a legal framework for protecting refugee children. The Convention and Protocol have set international legal standards, emphasising the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the expulsion or return of refugees to life-threatening situations.
- Challenges persist in their effective implementation, with Eurocentric origins potentially influencing the framing of refugees as a problem and hindering protection for those from non-Western regions.
- EU asylum policies, influenced by these agreements, struggle to achieve harmonisation and common protection standards across member states.
- Limitations are evident in the reluctance of some Southeast Asian countries to ratify the Convention, despite their historical role in hosting refugees.

- **The Brazil Declaration**

- In December of 2014, a ministerial meeting was held in Brazil by the UNHCR, 28 country representatives, and three territories in Latin America and the Caribbean which adopted a road map to account for new trends in displacement and to end statelessness by 2040.

- o Following talks with governments, international and regional organisations, and civil society in Argentina, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and the Cayman Islands, the year-long commemorative process known as Cartagena +30 came to an end with the gathering in Brazil.
- o The 2004 Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America and the 1994 San José Declaration on Refugees and Displaced Persons, which concentrated on internal displacement, are two regional frameworks that have been built upon by the Brazil Declaration.
- **The Global Compact on Refugees**
 - o After two years of intensive discussion coordinated by UNHCR with Member States, and international organisations, among many others. The UN General Assembly approved the Global Compact on Refugees on December 17, 2018.
 - o The Global Compact on Refugees recognises that international cooperation is necessary to find a sustainable solution to refugee crises, and provides a framework for more equal and predictable responsibility-sharing.
 - o There are 4 key objectives of the Global Compact for Refugees:
 - Ease the pressures on host countries,
 - Enhance refugee self-reliance,
 - Expand access to third country-solutions,
 - and support conditions in countries of origin for return in dignity and safety.

Possible Solutions

- There is an imperative need for community integration programmes. Developing and implementing programs that facilitate the integration of refugees into host communities,

including language training, employment support, and cultural awareness initiatives are needed to ensure displaced persons are comfortably adjusted to their new communities.

- Strengthen partnerships with NGOs and civil society groups to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian response and protection efforts.
- Another possible solution is to develop and implement comprehensive asylum policies that consider the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different refugee populations, including women, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

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