

Background Guide for Refugee Committee

Introduction

The refugee crisis has become a global issue; no region in the world is unaffected, as a country of transit or as a producer or receiver of refugees. In 2019 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes forcibly displaced people (FDPs) as a group consisting of internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, and stateless people. There are over 70.8 million FDPs worldwide; 41.3 million of those are IDPs, 25.9 million are refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers.¹ The UNHCR defines IDPs as those who have been forced from their homes while remaining in their own country. Factors for displacement include armed conflicts, violence and basic human rights violations.² According to the 2016 New York Declaration, other factors of displacement include adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters (some of which may link to climate change), or other environmental factors.³ Those removed from their homes due to the factors mentioned above are not considered forcibly displaced and are not currently under the protection of the UNHCR. Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence.⁴ Asylum-seekers are those awaiting refugee status protection from foreign nations.⁵ Those who become displaced are at risk of losing access to education, healthcare, employment, and autonomy when they transition from a citizen of their home country to a stateless person. Currently, we are witnessing the highest record of displacement in history where one person is forcibly displaced every two seconds as a result of conflict or persecution.⁶ Further, the global population of forcibly displaced increased by 2.3 million people in 2018.⁷ The current infrastructures in place are not equipped to handle the increasing influx of FDPs, resulting in the current crisis. With these numbers gradually increasing there is an urgency for the international community to understand the need for but not limited to humanitarian aid for FDPs, creating a general framework for successful integration of displaced people in host countries, and clear recognition of climate refugees within the UNHCR.

Throughout history, large groups have been displaced but reached record highs with trends that are not reversing and rates that are not slowing.⁸ In 1951, during the creation of the UN Declaration, there were 9 million displaced people. This number has grown exponentially to the figures we see today due to people fleeing armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses.⁹ Displaced groups are at risk of losing some of the most basic human rights, such as education and healthcare. Those without homes also often find themselves without the means to obtain sustainable employment and have limited autonomy. These individuals lack equal access to work, health, education and skill training to integrate into host countries. They are thus relying on welfare given by a host country, which results in a more costly and less efficient means of handling the current crisis. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands are examples of host countries implementing active deterrent policies and anti-integrative programs.¹⁰ Not only are FDPs in these programs deprived of their homes, but while seeking

¹ UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

² *ibid.*

³ New York Declaration

⁴ UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ United Nations. 2019. "Global Issues - Migration" Un.org Accessed September 8. www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html

⁹ New York Declaration, paragraph 1.

¹⁰ The Asylum-Integration Paradox: Comparing Asylum Support Systems and Refugee Integration in The Netherlands and the UK.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.nuncio.cofc.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=116709113&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

asylum, they are subject to inadequate systems of refuge.¹¹ The ideal system would encompass “equal access to work, health, education, and development of social networks and language proficiency”,¹² which inadequate systems of refuge do not. The UNHCR has publicly stated that they are working closely with host governments and partners to support a coordinated and comprehensive approach like providing States with basic needs, including shelter as well as coordinating information and assistance.¹³

History/Role of UN

The UNHCR, founded in 1950, is the main United Nations (UN) body that aims to aid and protect people forced to flee their homes due to violence, conflict, and persecution.¹⁴ Their office was designed with the task of helping refugees after the second world war¹⁵, resulting in the 1951 Convention on Refugees. In 1956, the UNHCR aided to resettle 200,000 Hungarians fleeing to Austria due to the Hungarian Revolution.¹⁶ Further, their efforts included the 1960s decolonization of Africa, which saw the organization’s first involvement outside of Europe.¹⁷ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the UNHCR strengthened relationships with African countries and improved international/interagency cooperation within the United Nations. This brought about to address the mass displacement seen in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Over the following two decades, the UNHCR’s network of aid had extended to those displaced in Asia and Latin America who are facing violence due to organized crime and ethnic cleansing.¹⁸ The UNHCR dealt with those fleeing from South East Asia by strengthening the refugee infrastructure in Thailand. About 3 million people were forced to flee from Indochina countries in the 1970s. Resulting in large-scale emergency relief operations in Asia, Africa, and Central America. The UNHCR established and managed large-refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia in the 1980’s. Conflicts began to erupt or worsen around the world across the decades, the UNHCR had mitigated the severity of displacement on those attempting the flee their disastrous situations. From providing food, water, and shelter to minimizing the conflicts at the time, the agency played a pivotal role in the international community.

In 2016 the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (New York Declaration), with Member States committing to global support and responsibility in dealing with the large numbers of forcibly displaced people (FDPs). In 2018, a Global Compact on Refugees, a tool to better define cooperation and share responsibilities, established refugee rights.¹⁹ The Global Compact recognizes that “climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements”²⁰, further acknowledging there are refugees stemming from this issue which the Declaration cites the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in its introduction.²¹ There are four key objectives of the Compact which are to: ease the pressure on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to third-country solutions; support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. The programme of action calls for repatriation, recognition of refugees as permanent

¹¹ The Asylum-Integration Paradox. International Migration Vol. 54 (4) 2016. Linda Bakker, Sin Yi Cheung and Jenny Phillimore.

¹² The Asylum-Integration Paradox: Comparing Asylum Support Systems and Refugee Integration in The Netherlands and the UK.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.nuncio.cofc.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=116709113&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

¹³ Barchfield, *In a trek to safety, Venezuelans take on mountain peaks on foot*, 2019.

<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2019/9/5d6fadfe4/trek-safety-venezuelans-mountain-peaks-foot.html>

¹⁴ UNHCR, *What We Do*, 2018. <https://www.unrefugees.org/about-us/>.

¹⁵ UNHCR, *The 1951 Refugee Convention*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/1951-refugee-convention.html>

¹⁶ UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/history-of-unhcr.html>

¹⁷ UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/history-of-unhcr.html>

¹⁸ UNHCR, *History of UNHCR*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/history-of-unhcr.html>

¹⁹ UN: Refugees and Migrants, *Global Compact on Refugees*, 2019. <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact>

²⁰ UNHCR, *Global Compact on Refugees*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

²¹ New York Declaration, paragraph 18.

immigrants, and perceptiveness instead of just reactionary aid. However, it should be noted that these Global Compacts are perceived as a guide and are not legally binding on States.

Current Events and Actions Taken by the International Community

The following events highlights the ongoing crisis and demonstrates that there are no current success models for refugee resettlement within the international community. In South America, more than 4 million Venezuelans have fled due to the political and social upheaval that sparked inflation; scarcity in needs like food, medicine and electricity; and widespread violence. This crisis has affected those of neighbouring countries such as Ecuador, Peru and Chile. Just in August, Ecuador's response to the steep increase of Venezuelan refugees was to declare a State of Emergency, which led to imposing a new passport rule. Even Brazil's attitude towards this crisis shifted towards stricter border control citing that they have their own problems to deal with.²² More and more countries in this region have begun to implement new policies to restrict border control.

The most recent "environmental" refugees are currently fleeing their homes in the Bahamas due to Hurricane Dorian's destruction. Refugees are seeking Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States which is being denied. Contrary to when Haiti was struck by an earthquake in 2010, the United States gave almost 60,000 of its citizens TPS due to extreme circumstances.²³ Changing weather patterns and growing temperatures have taken a toll on crops, livestock, and water readiness. Natural disaster strength and commonness have increased, leaving areas such as the Maldives, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands at severe risk.²⁴ The need to switch to organic methods of power and fuel, though necessary, place a burden on developing and third-world countries, leaving less money and more problems in these host countries.

While the international community lacks a standard global framework for refugee resettlement, regional communities have developed their own. The European Union (EU), which is a core partner of the UNHCR, aimed at introducing 20,000 EU resettlement places per year by 2020.²⁵ They proposed the European Agenda for Migration based on factors such as a members' population, unemployment rate and GDP in mind.

Challenges

With the largest levels of displacement on record it is hard to adequately handle all currently displaced people. Although there has been established international aid, there has yet to be an established shared responsibility of refugees by states to alleviate some of the pressures placed on neighboring host countries. To date, there has not been a global standard for resettlement, thus the UNHCR aims to partner with, and guide, host states according to their capacities. Each host state currently maintains the ability to establish their own infrastructure and guidelines for refugee management. Those seeking asylum in Europe increased from 200,000 to 320,000 in just a span of six years. Yet, countries in the European Union (EU) have largely resisted uniform immigration policy, leaving each nation a level of autonomy in developing ways to address this crisis. This allows for active deterrent policies and anti-integrative programs in each state. These programs range from the subpar housing policies adopted by the United Kingdom and the segregative Dutch support systems. Furthermore, issues such as changing weather patterns and growing temperatures have taken a toll on populations in areas such as the Maldives, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands which are at severe risk of possibly seeking asylum in neighbouring countries. This poses the issue of expanding the definition of refugee to include those affected by natural disasters. Additionally, the 1951

²² <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-venezuela-latin-america-exodus-20190218-story.html>

²³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2019/09/12/reports-that-us-wont-offer-bahamians-protected-status-while-islands-recover-dont-surprise-experts/>

²⁴ UNHCR, Climate Change and Disaster Displacement, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

²⁵ UNHCR, Statement by Deputy Director Wei-Meng Lim-Kabaa on Progress Report on Resettlement at the 54th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive of the High Commissioner's Programme on 26-28 June 2012, in Geneva, 2012.

Refugee Convention did not recognize people displaced due to natural disasters as refugees leaving no established procedure for these groups of people when fleeing their home countries. This leaves those like the Bahamians hit by Hurricane Dorian vulnerable. The UNHCR has expressed further concerns over the monsoon season approaching, with insufficient infrastructure protecting refugees.²⁶ With 742,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, who fled Myanmar due to religious persecution, aid agencies like UNICEF in Bangladesh have reported difficulties coming up with resources such as healthcare, shelter, food, and clothing for the refugees citing inadequate funds from donors.²⁷

Conclusion and Committee Directive

Possible solutions to these challenges include amending the 1951 Refugee Convention to include displaced persons due to natural disasters and other adverse symptoms of climate change as Environmental Refugees. Another solution for state responsibility includes analyzing state capabilities, such as resources and population. This could be in the form of financial aid for host countries (especially developing countries) or technical assistance such as managing resettlement programs and providing an alternative resettlement options. Delegates are encouraged to adopt a uniform framework to address concerns of segregated housing policy and restrictive employment in many countries. While ensuring each host country has proper infrastructure in place to provide each refugee the ability to learn language proficiency, skills, and access to healthcare. The delegates of the Refugee Committee should work towards establishing a universal standard for equal access to work, education, healthcare, and development programs. Defining these programs as successful refugee integration.

²⁶ UNHCR, *Homepage*, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/>

²⁷ <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-facts>