

Committee: SOCHUM 1 (welfare and human rights of protected groups)

Topic: The question of migration and rights of refugees

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Summary

Migration and the rights of refugees is often classed as a controversial topic due to the intense and complex nature of the debate. It's important to recognise the difference between a 'migrant' and a 'refugee' as they aren't the same and this can cause confusion and discrimination. The term 'refugee' often has unfair and negative connotations which significantly impacts the way they are treated. A 'refugee' has fled their home country because they are at risk of "serious human rights violations and persecution", they have a right to international protection. Alternatively, a 'migrant' is a person outside of their country of origin who is not fleeing persecution. Some migrants leave their country to find work, education or stay with family; others are escaping poverty, gang violence, political turmoil or natural disasters etc. Ultimately refugees should be distinguished from migrants to promote more accommodating and understanding policy.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugee: an individual fleeing their home country due to human rights violations, war or persecution

Migrant: an individual leaving their country not due to human rights violations, war or persecution

Migration: the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling permanently or temporarily

'm': million

UNHCR: UN Refugee Agency

Resettlement: after a refugee flees their home country and lands in their place of asylum, they can attempt to 'resettle' elsewhere and gain citizenship in another country

NGOs: non-profit organisations, independent of the government

Background Information

Refugees are nothing new. For centuries, even in ancient times, groups opposing the 'norm' for several reasons were forced to flee persecution and seek asylum. The modern refugee crisis has been present for many years, particularly concerning countries like Syria 6.8m, Afghanistan

2.7m, Venezuela 4.6m, South Sudan 2.4m, Myanmar 1.2m and most recently Ukraine 6m. Turkey hosts the most refugees 3.8m in 2021.

It's important to recognise the difference between refugees and migrants as stated in the summary. Furthermore, if there happens to be a group of refugees and migrants, it's important not to merge them together. Instead they should be referred to as refugees and migrants or called a 'mixed movement'. A refugee moving to a new country of Asylum doesn't change their status as a refugee. Eg: a Ukrainian refugee may first reach safety in Poland, but they are still legally classed as a refugee if they then reach the UK or Germany for example.

As for migration, this is an ever increasing phenomenon which is unlikely to slow down due to the rising global population. Today there are over 258m migrants living around the world. The USA has most immigrants, 25% come from Mexico. France and Canada also receive over 8m a year.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

UNHCR – worlds NO.1 aid to refugees helping 50m between 1950 and 2020. They have 18,879 employees in 137 countries. They initially had a budget of \$300,000 but now it's \$8.6bn (2019)

Syria - today the highest number of refugees come from Syria as they flee civil war

Ukraine - a recent surge in Ukrainian refugees due to the Russian invasion puts Ukraine as 2nd highest number of refugees.

The 6 countries mentioned in the background information will also be severely affected.

Turkey – naturally Turkey, taking the most refugees, is heavily involved in the debate about refugees, but it's also important to recognise this is partly because they're bordering Syria. Therefore, it's key to acknowledge the countries bordering countries with high levels of refugees. Eg: Poland and Iran

China – they have been known to reject refugees from North Korea and have been in violation of the UNHCR several times

Timeline of Events

1950 - UNHCR created

1954 – UNHCR won the Nobel Peace Prize

1956 – 1st major challenge of UNHCR when 200,000 Hungarians fled to Austria during the Hungarian Revolution. This shaped how they would deal with future crises

1975 – Convention Concerning Migrants in Abusive Conditions and Protection of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers, ensures fair pay and working conditions

1977 – European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers

1981 – UNHCR won the Nobel Peace Prize again, being recognised as the NO.1. worldwide assistance programme for refugees.

1990 - UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers Defines the term migrant

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

The 1951 Refugee Convention – primary international standard against which any measures for the protection and treatment of refugees are judged. The greatest challenge of this convention is making sure states comply.

1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Family – aims to guarantee dignity and equality for all. Migrant workers

2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants – aims to develop global infrastructure for safe, orderly and regular migration

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

- All of the treaties above have worked to solve the issue of migration and the rights of refugees. Each piece is key to improvement however, constant development and the creation of new treaties will forever be ongoing.

Possible Solutions

One solution is voluntary repatriation: the refugee will voluntarily return to their home country through assistance and sustainable reintegration programmes and “Go and See’ visits where they can see if their country is at the stage of welcoming them back.

However, this solution can prevent countries from taking necessary actions to protect refugees and instead can promote forcible removal from the host country, back into the hostile environment.

Another solution is local integration: successfully welcoming/introducing the refugee into the host country to facilitate the development of a new life. This would be more successful if NGOs participated in integration projects. This would also be more successful if work places and schools implemented education programmes to tackle prejudice and wrongful discrimination.

This plan of including NGOs and schools would also benefit migrants and they too face often inappropriate/unnecessary hate.

A further possible solution is resettlement programmes. This is where the refugee or migrant move to a new country and begin a life there. This solution would be successful if there were more effective lobbying opportunities for resettlement, more flexible selection criteria, more resettlement agreements between countries and cooperation.

However, there is a significant danger of carelessness being struck between countries which do not acknowledge the rights of refugees as human beings. Moreover, of the 20.4m refugees under concern of the UNHCR, less than 1% are resettled.

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