

Forum: World Health Assembly (WHA)

Issue: Fostering global cooperation for the improvement of refugee and migrant health worldwide

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Introduction

The question of whether the lives of migrants and refugees matter has emerged as the number of migrants and refugees has surged in recent years. Sadly, the hardships of migrants and refugees have often been devalued and disregarded, requiring more comprehension of the situation. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1 billion migrants live in a foreign nation with excruciating difficulties globally, of which 82 are forcibly displaced. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) discloses that, of the 108.4 million refugees, 43.4 million are children, 1.9 million were born as refugees, 453,600 were returned or resettled without UNHCR's aid, and roughly 4.4 million of them currently stateless, having no sanctuary or safeguard of the international community. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) firmly states that 281 million migrants officially exist worldwide, and reportedly, 740 million internal migrants are still on the runway of finding refuge.

According to the WHO, these migrants and refugees tend to be the most vulnerable group in society as they repeatedly face segregated and discriminatory behavior from the rest, possess limited or inadequate health services, lack sufficient housing and working opportunities, and are often prone to penurious living locations. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic verified the pre-existing deprivations, such as living standards and even social inequalities of these refugee and migrant groups, as they became farther apart from accessible healthcare due to the lack of medical supplies. Due to their dispersed demographical locations, much of the "actual" COVID-19 cases remain unknown. Additionally, UNHCR reveals roughly 52% of the refugees originate from only three countries: the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine (primarily due to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War), and Afghanistan. Likewise, 38% of these refugees are hosted in 5 countries: Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Colombia, Germany, and Pakistan.

They are also vulnerable to health diseases that often develop due to insufficient food supply. As per the WHO, these health issues include "communicable diseases, accidental injuries, hypothermia,

burns either due to intense heat caused by global warming or close contact with fire, unwanted pregnancy and delivery-related complications caused by unmonitorable rape cases and various non-communicable diseases on a variety of differing ranges.” Moreover, in the status quo, the WHO has initiated the “Health and Migration Programme (PHM)” and the “Global Action Plan (GAP)”, which aim to enhance the security and rights of refugees. In simpler terms, the two projects translate to an active action for the global refugee community with the collaboration of WHO, the IOM, and the UNHCR. Together, these organizations host the “Third Global Consultation on the Health of Refugees and Migrants in Rabat, Morocco. Based on the urgency of the refugee crisis, it is of foremost interest to act upon refugee welfare to protect their humanitarian rights and provide equivalent opportunities.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugee

As defined per the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is one who involuntarily escapes war or is unwilling to return to their home country due to reasons of ongoing persecution, religious differences, race, nationality, and even political opinions to find a sanctuary in foreign nations, usually neighboring nations play this role. They forcibly leave their loved ones, carry minimal clothing and food supplies, turn unemployed without an assured wage, and are vulnerable to physical diseases or bodily damage due to violence engaged by monstrous groups and illness or weakness caused by the lack of food and water sources.

Asylum, “The Right of Asylum”

The Right of Asylum is an ancient juridical jargon stating that people can be protected by a neighboring kingdom or governing authority whenever their sovereign persecutes them. In modern terms, a similar idea applies to “refuge,” protection, safety, or giving shelter to someone who forcefully left their homeland for political or economic reasons.

Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

LDCs are countries highly vulnerable to socioeconomic disruptions. They often need more human assets for daily operations. These countries simultaneously encounter hindrances against sustainable economic development; thus, they urgently require humanitarian aid in areas of development assistance and comparative trade from the UN. There are 46 LDCs worldwide, of which 33 are from Africa, nine are from Asia, one from the Caribbean, and three are from the Pacific.

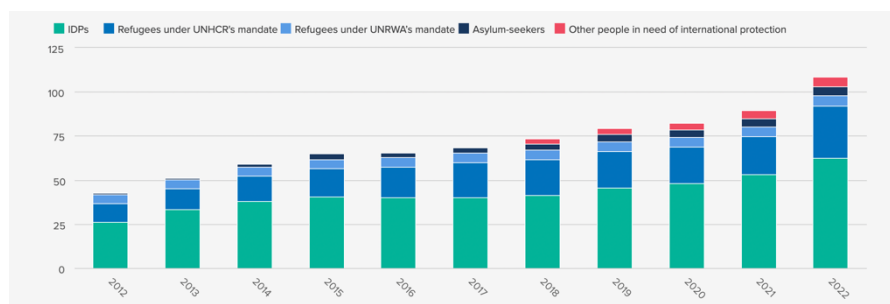
Background Information

With many refugees reportedly escaping persecution or any substantial threat from the Middle East, Europe and many more countries located in Eurasia have been plundered with mass immigration each year, refugees or migrants of any sort searching for a secure and protected home. In totality, refugees suffering from a strenuous lifestyle require international aid in terms of steady availability of medical, food, and water supplies and an ideological barricade against discrimination, stereotyping, and racism.

Barriers refugee currently withstand

Refugee & migrant health endangered

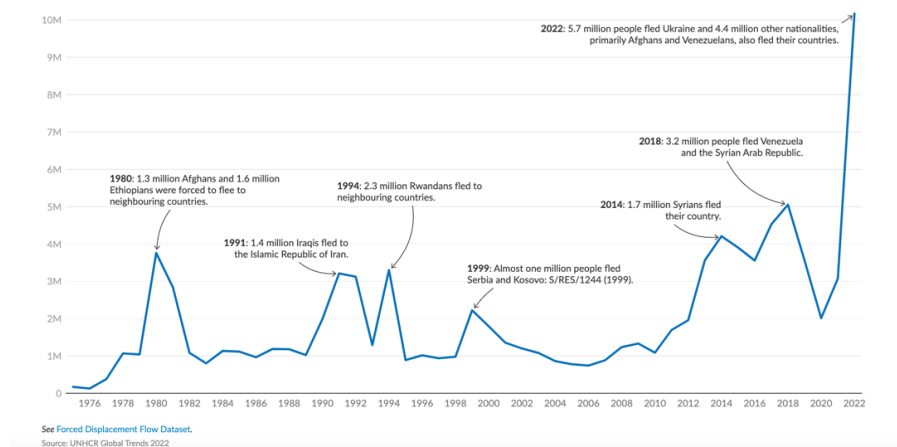
Altogether, refugees face exclusion across national healthcare treatment and care since, in certain nations, they lack a legal citizenship document, which limits them from accessing the same opportunities and benefits such as medical health insurance, ease in receiving bank loans, and education sectors as regular citizens. Many refugees are poorly protected financially, abused, and exploited due to their different cultural and religious thoughts and heritage. They often struggle to defend themselves from sexual assault and gender-based violence. Consequently, several new-borns die before coming to life in their mother's wombs due to failed pregnancies and childbirth with the lack of antenatal care, likely caused by unhygienic conditions, high costs of medical treatment, absence of sufficient medical aid and equipment, or the lack of sanitary menstrual equipment. Due to Refugees' wearing-out journeys, where they have insufficient food and water, make refugees more vulnerable to life-threatening diseases, particularly measles, waterborne diseases, malaria, eczema, and ulcers. With their routes taken, either by land or traveling through seas, refugees are now endangered by respiratory, gastrointestinal, and skin-related diseases. Likewise, refugees undergo mental derangement or develop PTSD due to traumatic or stressful experiences, developing fatigue, unhealthy schedules of sleep routines, anxieties, mental distress, and other psychological illnesses.



Caption #1: People forced to flee worldwide (2012-2022)

Refugee acceptance plays a significant role in many countries where they find refuge. For instance, Europe has been a haven to several refugees across the Afro-Eurasian plate over the

past decades. Nevertheless, rather than being a promised homeland of a perfect sanctuary, Europe compounds the number of pre-existing deprivations on refugees and migrants immigrating. As the National Library of Medicine reports, medical healthcare, as well as immigration, have gradually begun to steepen in size, meaning accessing healthcare treatment has become more complex as medical prices rise and healthcare insurance requirements and availability decline. Over the past years, a report published by the UNHCR detected that the number of people who forcibly fled their own country exceeded 60 million, of which 20.2 million refugees escaped war and persecution. In addition, Non-Communicable Diseases (NDCs) have been exacerbated by insufficient availability of urgent medical care, resulting in increased severity and associated complications, thus aggravating both morbidity and mortality.

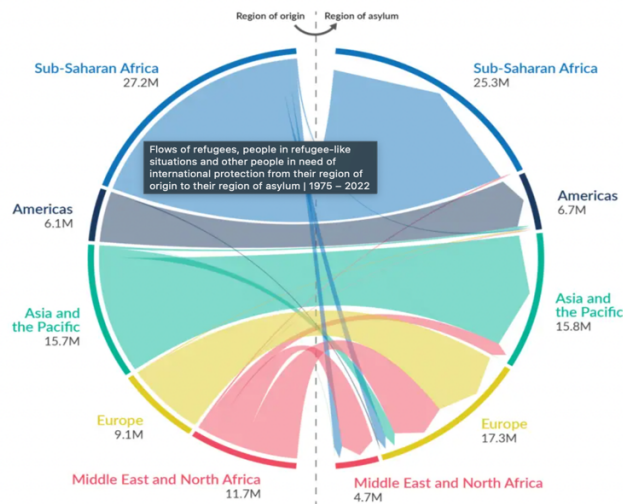


Caption #2: Refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection displaced during each year | 1975 – 2022

The discussion then stretches to external violence, which negatively impacts refugee health and the assurances of their mental well-being. A significant cause for their declining physical welfare has been resurrected with the enlarging police violence and brutality. A report by the Refugee Rights Data Project (RRDP) surveyed 870 individuals in Calais regarding police brutality. It concluded that 75% had witnessed police violence, 69.9% had been forcibly exposed to tear gas, and 42.4% had suffered physical violence from the local police. Correspondingly, the police of North Macedonia have engaged in acts of crimes against the refugee community settled within the Idomeni refugee camp between the Greek and North Macedonian border. In this specific incident, roughly 300 refugees were fiercely mistreated by the local North Macedonian police as these security forces ultimately attempted to prohibit the ventures of refugees from crossing the border by using stun grenades, rubber bullets, and tear gas, thus resulting in casualties of 200 experiencing respiratory problems due to exposures to tear gas.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has officially been announced “to have elapsed,” the pandemic’s effects on refugee communities continue to harm people’s physical safety across the globe. Even if practicing social distancing may seem like an easy alternative to avoid COVID-19, self-isolation and lockdowns have become a struggle. In addition, COVID has also caused them financial hardships as refugees often have difficulty finding new jobs in new regions. At the IOM placed in Geneva, Switzerland, Poonam Dhawan addressed: “Migrants have been disproportionally affected by the COVID-19 crisis and too are often left out of pandemic response mechanisms.” Furthermore, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) identified social effects, including rising discrimination, lengthy lockdowns restricting internal and domestic movement, border closures restricting refugee reunion with their families, and social stigmatization, accusing them of spreading COVID. In addition, refugees have been excluded from receiving equitable and sufficient health facilities, including COVID-19 vaccination and medical equipment such as surgical face masks, clean clothing, and sanitary pads for women. Not to mention, past reports point towards existing struggle among refugees due to prices of daily commodities rising exponentially, making necessities such as food and water exceedingly tough to afford. With LDCs suffering economically due to insufficient social protectionist policies, dolor tends to be inevitable for the refugee community.

COVID-19’s destructive impact on people has caused many to leave their nations, searching for employment and improved living standards due to deteriorating socioeconomic circumstances within their countries, such as daily commodities becoming unaffordable, rapid inflation harming regular financial operations, and COVID’s direct impact on people’s physical well-being. The pre-existing poor socioeconomic situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, home to 18,700 refugees from Iraq, compounded with COVID-19 infiltrating Syrian borders in 2021 and recent natural disasters such as earthquakes, further eradicating the socioeconomic conditions. UNHCR reported that 90% of the Syrian population is living in poverty immensely requires humanitarian aid, and additionally aided several “internally displaced people” (IDPs) by providing them with multisectoral assistance, including core relief items, and by distributing \$208.5 million to approximately 3.5 million endangered refugees in Syria. Likewise, UNHCR, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Refugee Agency, developed the “regional refugee and resilience plan” (3RP). The 3RP plan accommodates 270 partners, who have actively addressed the needs and requirements of 7.1 million, with five supporting nations: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The recent Ukrainian war follows similar footprints, adding more refugees; most have found refuge in nearby regions, especially Poland.



Caption #3: Flows of refugees, people in refugee-like situations and other people in need of international protection from their region of origin to their region of asylum | 1975 – 2022

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Since the year 1950, UNHCR has worked towards providing essential protection and assistance to people forced to flee their homes, asylum seekers, and internally displaced peoples. The organization has worked to deliver adequate humanitarian aid to those who forcefully flee persecution, war, and violence back in their home countries.

Republic of Turkey (Türkiye)

For the past 9 years, Turkey, an active participatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, has become a global leader in hosting refugees across the Eurasian terrestrial plate. To modern day, Turkey hosts roughly 4 million refugees, mostly Syrian, within its borders, and provides them sufficient care and aid for a temporary welfare as per their international policies settling down to their Law over Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP). As per reports, refugees have had greater access to local services such as education and healthcare due to LFIP, and Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN)'s cash assistance, funded by the European Union (UN). On the contrary, Turkey has recently been hit by two devastating earthquakes making inflation rise in extremity, increasing unemployment, and mass loss of infrastructure and lives. Across the past decades, the Turkish government has issued work permits for Syrian refugees, has given them educational opportunities, and has tried to engage refugees in gender-based violences and empowerment programs. On the contrary, with rising numbers of refugee influx within Turkey, civilians' attitudes towards refugees have gradually transitioned from being hospitable to tolerating them mainly as refugees bring their own culture and

become competitors for employment spaces. With Turkey's government providing adequate care to its refugees, the underlying socioeconomic pressure of sustaining refugees for long-term, compounded by the latest earthquakes have begun to disturb Turkey's social and economic stability.

The Republic of Syria

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011 among the pro-democracy party and local authorities, which disregarded the presence of a democracy. The twelve-year war has produced vast numbers of civilians requiring refuge in another place as Syria's economy trembles, and the land has become a battleground. As per UNHCR, 6.9 million Syrians have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including Turkey, Jordan, and its non-neighbouring country, Germany. The arrests against suspects quickly escalated into a civil war, leading to 13.4 million refugees today, of which 5.9 million are in acute urgency. Approximately 90% of modern-day Syrian refugees face poverty and unemployment, regardless of their stay in urban locations and city centers.

Ukraine

Throughout the past decade, Ukraine and Russia have had several tensions amongst territorial acquisitions; however, the conflict rose to its peak in the middle of months October and November 2021 after a mass Russian army build-up took place across Ukrainian borders and invaded Crimea, surprising the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s policies regarding active war. The war has pessimistically impacted the lives of Ukrainian citizens, but the war does not seem to elapse. According to the operational data port, about 6,217,800 refugees from Ukraine are recorded globally, of which 5,861,000 are in Europe and 356,500 are outside European borders.

Plan International

A non-governmental organization (NGO) that reopened its office in 2009, settled in Hong Kong, delivers humanitarian aid to child development programs internationally, specifically in Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, and Africa. The organization has attempted to address female equality in education and society by offering them education, has taken several actions to enhance child well-being, led emergency relief offerings, and directed considerable donations.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
July 28 th , 1951	The 1951 Refugee Convention was a UN-created document to address the well-being of refugees, especially after the pernicious World Wars. The principle of

	non-refoulement firmly announces no refugee to be sent back or expelled to their home country, where they are vulnerable to physical damage.
October 4 th , 1967	The 1967 Convention ratified the limitation stated in the 1951 Refugee Convention, replacing the temporal and geographical location restrictions.
1950-1990	The Cold War between the two global superpowers, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) produced a series of nuclear tensions and ideological warfare, turning into several proxy wars and creating more global refugees.
April, 1999	The breakup of Yugoslavia resulted in Serbian terrorism in the Balkans, with Bosnian Serbs rejecting Bosnian Muslims. The conflict between Serbians and Kosovnas led to over 600,000 Kosova refugees.
March 15 th , 2011	Syrian civil war began, resulting in millions of refugees until this day.
February 24 th , 2022	The Russo-Ukrainian war began with Russia's physical penetration over Ukrainian soil, thus causing turmoil among NATO member states and increasing countless numbers of refugees monthly.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- SEVENTY-SECOND WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY, May 23rd, 2019 (**WHA72/2019/REC/1**)
- Extension of the WHO global action plan on promoting the health of refugees and migrants, 2019–2023 to 2030, February 6th, 2023 (**EB152/SR/15**)
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (The 1951 Refugee Convention), July 28th, 1951 (***several resolutions included within the main document***)
- SIXTY-FIRST WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY, May 19th-24th, 2008 (**WHA61.1**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

UN's efforts

After Nazi persecution of Jews and the displacement of millions of people worldwide, the UN first discussed the value of a refugee at the 1951 Refugee Convention Conference, where nations met to present their remorse for the suffering of refugees, made certain decisions to protect vulnerable refugees and guarantee them a sanctuary, specifically by stating the policy of non-refoulment and requiring necessities to be delivered properly. Later, the document was eased in the 1967 Convention to make the

procedures more inclusive and fairer to refugees outside of specific geographical locations. Since then, nations have agreed to collectively form havens within their national borders for the betterment of refugees and migrants.

The UNHCR Global Consultations in 2022 and NGOs worldwide have provided a vital forum for discussion over global advocacy and the well-being of the refugee and migrants committee. The Consultations have witnessed great success, with more than 500 NGOs and refugee organizational committees becoming a part of this discussion forum. Additionally, the consultations will occur biennially among regional and global NGOs and the UNHCR to further converse over refugee welfare. The benefactor of such a collaboration among UNHCR and NGOs results in finer and more readily available medical aid to refugees or any in need.

The UNHCR has played a heavy role in expanding sanitary conditions for refugees across the Middle East while working with five significant nations and assisting the 7.1 million refugees and asylum-seekers. Their program, 3RP, seeks to expand local authorities' assistance towards refugees by providing them with a perfect home and an inclusive nature to welcome asylum-seeking refugees. As the UNHCR addresses, the 3RP initiative protects people, supporting durable solutions, supporting dignified lives, and enhancing local and national capacities through unforgetting those without any protection. Likewise, the Rabat declaration in Morocco highlights work towards health and social protectionist policies. Precisely, the organization known as Doctors of the World imitated child immigration actions in Greece by gaining judicial victories, thus asking the French government to provide urgent aid to vulnerable children and pregnant women in refugee camps by providing them with improved sanitation materials such as clean restrooms and rubbish collection areas promoting the physical health of children and pregnant women.

Furthermore, the WHO's Global Action Plan (GAP) cooperates with the UNHCR and IOM to ensure the safety and prosperity of refugees. In summation, the action plans serve as a framework containing principles to promote the prosperity and security of the refugee community worldwide. This framework guides member states who willingly participate in this project to facilitate the maintenance of the overall well-being of refugees and contributes to finding the best possible ways to build a "perfect" refugee sanctuary, as stated in the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In addition, on June 13, 2023, in the 3rd Global Consultation on the Health of Refugees and Migrants hosted in Rabat, Morocco, with co-hosts, the WHO, the UNHCR, and the IOM, the Rabat Declaration addresses a unificatory and visionary voice toward the sustainability and fortune of the global refugee community, specifically by galvanizing international responses and providing refugees appropriate and adequate medical equipment and support.

Refugees in South Asia

Reports find 11.3 million Bangladeshi Hindu refugees to have entered the Indian subcontinent and live in eastern Indian states. Over the past years, the partition of India has earned the title of the largest human migration in human history, with roughly 14.5 million people migrating across the Indo-Pakistani border. As the brutal warfare and the bloodthirsty atmosphere elapsed after the partition, refugees and migrants continued to travel across borders in search of family reunions across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India. Although political hostility remained among the countries, in protecting the refugees, the Indian government arranged refugee camps and departments for rehabilitation, secured employment opportunities, and provided acres of land to migrants. Additionally, UNHCR has actively provided adequate aid to refugees in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere.

Possible Solutions

Fundraising and donation

Social media fundraisers are a growing trend in modern society, which increases awareness of the refugee crisis and supports them socially and financially. Fundraising initially might be challenging; however, with solid dedication and popular support, fundraising becomes a viable option to care for refugee welfare without physically traveling. Such raised funds can be used to purchase necessities, precisely cooked food and drinkable water, to be delivered to the refugees and migrant committee. Likewise, donations, whether goods or money, through NGOs are another way of supporting refugees in vulnerable areas. Whether physical or on an online platform, fundraisers and donations serve as primary forms of assistance to refugee communities by gradually reinforcing their financial and physical security and sustainability; for example, several NGOs and fundraising organizations across the globe donated household commodities such as blankets, toilet paper, and clothing to the refugees in Turkey, where recent earthquakes have occurred. Although cybernetwork challenges might make fundraising on social media challenging due to scams, trusted NGO channels should be a precautionary start as the NGO's sole purpose settles down to aid refugees financially with adequate material aid. In general, channel leaders shall direct all the fundraising and ask their crew to securely distribute the support where it is urgently required to keep operations transparent and efficient.

Protection of refugees

Although one's voice may not seem important enough in front of a nation, the affirmative opinion of one holds many calibers to bring about a significant change. Spreading awareness of refugee urgent protection, reducing stigmatization and racism towards refugees, and promising them equal opportunities would enhance refugee welfare and result in a positive outcome on both sides. Maintaining a welcoming

attitude towards refugees guarantees them a sheltered haven against the difficulties refugees come from. Likewise, governments are encouraged to provide a hospitable environment full of opportunities to refugees regarding employment, insurance, and sufficient consumable resources such as food and water. Nations can always refer to the 1967 refugee convention, which reminds all its member states to heartwarmingly welcome and support any refugees at their nation's doorsteps.

Visionary goals

Furthermore, one of the long-term possible solutions is voluntary repatriation for courageous refugees to return home and reunite with their families. To emphasize, the repatriation should only apply to those willing to return to their home countries through organized sightseeing visits, updated information on the region of origin, the furtherance of property restitution, and legal aid to returnees. Accordingly, the international community should crucially support voluntary repatriation to ensure a peaceful resettlement of refugees to their country or region of origin. Second, people who cannot return due to troublesome conditions can only resettle in new locations with international aid through UNHCR's provision of cultural orientation and traditional customs, specifically through UN guidelines over engagement in peace and reconciliation. With the refugee issue being inevitable in multiple ways, solutions to remedy such a crisis gradually become arduous; however, such solutions are building blocks to create an improved future for the ones in grave need.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. Rabat Declaration (full document): https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/health-topics/refugee-and-migrant-health/rabat-declaration_final.pdf?sfvrsn=b62e87cf_9
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