



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

The Preservation of Self-Interest as Compared to the Growing Need to Stave a Humanitarian Crisis

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ABSTRACT

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Nonetheless, the refugee crisis is worsening at an alarming rate. This research examines the definition, meaning, and forms of refugees, as well as the circumstances and causes that contribute to the formation of asylum seekers across national borders. It discusses the various types of migrants, their models and ideas, as well as the concept of non-refoulement and countries' worldwide responsibilities in dealing with refugees. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and Global Refugee Forum (GRF), which aim to (1) relieve pressure on host countries, (2) improve refugee self-reliance; (3) expand access to third-country solutions, and (4) support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return; and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and their role in protecting the rights and interests of refugees; are discussed in the essay. Furthermore, we address the refugee crisis in several nations, as well as its social, economic, cultural, and political consequences. Before concluding, we discuss the governments' responses and the responsibilities of international organisations, as well as alternative solutions to the refugee crisis.

KEYWORDS: Refugees, Principle of Non-Refoulement, Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), Global Refugee Forum (GRF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

INTRODUCTION

"No one leaves home until home is the maw of a shark," as Warsan Shire accurately said. One person is uprooted every two seconds around the world, with 79.5 million individuals forcibly displaced, with children accounting for 40% of the total. Only 4.9 percent of those who were deported were allowed to return to their homeland. The term "refugee" has been redefined numerous times over the years. The 1951 Refugee Convention, enacted on July 28, 1951 by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries, was the first time the term "refugee" was formally defined. After World War I, the idea of international collaboration and burden sharing originally came to mind. The League of Nations, the world's first intergovernmental organisation (whose principal objective was to avert war by collective security and disarmament, and to settle international disputes through negotiation and arbitration), was the first to publicise the concerns and interests of refugees. With about 50 million individuals forced to flee their homes as a result of the Second World War, the necessity to enhance the organisation was obvious. A number of international agreements, known as treaties, resolutions, or recommendations, have addressed the refugee crisis. In this regard, the first agreements defined refugee status as the loss of national protection. All countries, through various incorporated mechanisms, embrace these international instruments universally. The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention currently has 145 signatories.

REFUGEE DEFINITION, TYPES, AND CAUSES

"Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their place of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion," according to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Persecution, according to the 1951 Charter, means that the institution of asylum as a whole is subjected to constraints that jeopardise the convention's humanitarian character. Furthermore, US law also distinguishes between refugees and asylees in a significant way. A refugee must qualify the 1951 Convention's definition of a refugee and pose a "special humanitarian concern" to the US.

There are six sorts of refugees and displaced individuals, according to Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian experiences: anticipating refugees, semi-refugees, impelled refugees, refugees of conflict, Expellees, and ex-camp-inmates' refugees. Anticipating Refugees are those who run for their lives at the first hint of danger and use "an escape in necessity." "These people are from the upper social classes, and they can afford to flee to safety." For example, since the Serbs had taken over around 70% of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were very few locations left in the country for Bosnian Muslims

and Croats, especially following the commencement of the Croat-Muslim conflict. Semi-refugees are a group of people who have fled their homes because they are afraid of future danger. Displaced refugees make up the third group. These are persons who have been compelled to leave their nation due to various forms of persecution, such as harassment, threats, intimidation, and humiliation. This is the most typical type of political refugee. People are displaced during a war for a variety of reasons, including political disputes, conflicts (economic, environmental, ethnic), religious intolerance, human rights violations, majority rule; and so on. The refugees from conflict-torn areas are referred to as “war refugees,” and they are separated into two categories: first-degree and second-degree war refugees. Those who have been directly injured by war, whether by having their homes demolished, suffering physical injury, or being in immediate risk of being killed or wounded, are considered refugees in the first degree. Second-degree war refugees, on the other hand, are diverse; they include military deserters as well as civilians who are attempting to avoid conscription. Expellees, as the term implies, are refugees who have been forced to flee their homeland. They may have been subjected to various forms of mistreatment and humiliation prior to their deportation. The expellees must decide whether to depart or remain in a dangerous land. The last type is the ex-camp-inmate. Detainees who have been illegally forced to stay in camps, jails, forced brothels, or even their own houses are known as refugees. They were enslaved workers with no legal rights.²

“Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries,” according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2011, 42.5 million people were forcibly displaced around the world. There were 15.4 million refugees and 895,000 asylum seekers in this group. Due to political or religious persecution, persecution based on ethnicity, nationality, or membership in a particular race; gender-based violence; the effects of war; high levels of repression; human rights abuse; human conflict; environmental change or natural disasters, or any well-founded fear of persecution, people may flee their home country to seek asylum in other countries. Despite the fact that combat has been a major motivator because it produces the greatest number of refugees, a person is not considered a refugee simply because they have fled a war zone, according to the convention. A mandate for refugee status is proof of persecution or hardship. The following are the most typical circumstances that cause refugees:³

1. Persecution

Persecutors are persons who are forced to depart their native country because of harassment, oppression, or unjust treatment based on their beliefs, such as political or religious affiliation, ethnicity, nationality, race, or participation in a certain group. These subgroups or splinter groups are frequently abused by the government or by groups who outnumber them, causing them to flee their homeland in quest of a safe haven.

2. War

War is one of the most significant factors to the refugee crisis since it not only displaces people internally and to other countries, but it also results in a lack of basic essentials such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, and clothing. War victims have no civil or political rights, and they spend all of their meagre resources in the hope of surviving. Unemployment aggravates the deteriorating situation. Post-independence conflicts, which include political fights, ethnic conflicts, religious intolerance, human rights violations, efforts for decolonization, majority rule, and apartheid, were the main causes of war in earlier years. Conflicts over economics and the environment also play a role in warfare.

3. Violation of Human Rights

Human rights breaches occur when the state denies citizens essential human rights (such as civil, political, social, and economic rights) and abuses and misuses its authorities. The key causes of human rights violations are defined as government behaviour and policy, armed conflicts, economic issues, and psychological factors. People have access to the legal system, but they are often tortured and tormented, forcing many to flee their homes.

4. Gender-Based Violence

Discriminatory gender norms and practices, starvation, war, and conflict are all factors that contribute to gender-based violence. It deprives a specific gender or sect of people of their fundamental rights, leading to mass persecution and humiliation of the minority. Long-term trauma and distress are experienced by the victims, which can be life-threatening in some cases. While women and children are commonly blamed for gender-based violence, members of the LGBTQ community are also victims. In 2012, the UNHCR changed its standards to add gender and sexual orientation as a cause for refugees, in response to the discriminatory treatment of the LGBTQ refugee community. The organisation justified itself by writing, “It is widely documented that LGBTQI individuals are the targets of killings, sexual and gender-based violence, physical attacks, torture, arbitrary detention, accusations of immoral or deviant behaviour, denial of the rights to assembly, expression, and information, and discrimination in employment, health, and education in all regions around the world.”

5. Hunger

People are forced to flee their homes in quest of basic essentials in order to survive. War and conflict, climate change, poverty, food shortages, poorly designed and managed public policy, and other factors all contribute to it. The vast majority of refugees are from impoverished countries that lack fundamental necessities for human survival. Around 805 million individuals consume less than 2100 calories per day, accounting for 11.3 percent of the world’s population. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Cuba, Georgia, Ghana, Kuwait, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Thailand, and Venezuela are among the countries that could successfully reduce hunger.

6. Environmental Factors

According to Jacobson (1988), “environmental refugees have become the single largest class of displaced persons in the world”. Tsunamis, chemical mishaps, droughts, hurricanes, and other natural disasters devastate the land and render it uninhabitable. In other cases, such as chemical mishaps or forest fires, the harm is irreversible, and no more life is possible. Droughts, floods, earthquakes, and other natural disasters also drive people to flee their homes.

THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-REFOULEMENT

(Article 33(1) of the 1951 Convention states, “No Contracting State shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or... freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

This provision under Article 33(1) of the 1951 Convention is universally acceptable and considered the most important provision with respect to the principle of non-refoulement. Article 33 of the 1951 Convention is also binding on states party to the 1967 Protocol. Article 3(1) of the United Nations Declaration on Territorial Asylum:

“No person referred to in Article 1, paragraph 1 shall be subjected to measures such as rejection at the frontier or, if he has already entered the territory in which he seeks asylum, expulsion or compulsory return to any state where he may be subjected to persecution.” The principle of non-refoulement explains that no person, such as a refugee fleeing from persecution in their own country and seeking asylum or shelter in other nations, would be subject to rejection at the periphery or expelled and forced to return to their home country where they were tortured, humiliated, and threatened with their lives. The principle of non-refoulement constitutes the cornerstone of international refugee protection and is binding on all organs of a state party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol as well as any other person acting on its behalf. There are certain exceptions to the principle of non-refoulement under the 1951 Convention, expressly provided in article 33(2).

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROTECTING REFUGEES’ RIGHTS AND INTERESTS

On a global and local level, there are numerous international organisations. Some organisations are regionally focused, working to improve the lives of refugees solely in a certain geographic area. These international organisations collaborate on the development of policies and programmes to assist displaced people. Under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), such organisations as the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) establish numerous policies that are universally acknowledged. Protection against refoulement under Article 33(1) applies to any person who is a refugee under the terms of the 1951 Convention, that is, anyone who meets the requirements of the refugee definition contained in Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention. “The benefit of [Article 33(1)] may not, however, be claimed by a refugee whom there are reasonable grounds for regarding as a danger to the security of the country in which he [or she] is, or who, having been convicted by a final judgement of a particularly serious crime, constitutes a danger to the community of that country.”

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spearheaded extensive consultations with member states, international organisations, civil society, professionals, and the commercial sector, as well as refugees, to authorise the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) on December 17th, 2018. It thinks that international cooperation can lead to a more long-term solution, which can be reached by countries sharing duties in a more predictable and equitable manner. It offers a roadmap that combines a unique set of opportunities to transform countries’ attitudes regarding refugees. GCR works with governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders to ensure that communities hosting refugees receive the assistance they require and may live productive lives.

The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) is a comprehensive refugee response concept that establishes agreements for both refugees and host communities so that both benefit from one another’s existence. Its goals are to relieve strain on host nations, strengthen refugee self-sufficiency, expand access to third-country solutions, and improve conditions in refugee-hosting countries so that refugees can return in safety and dignity. In December 2019, the first-ever Global Refugee Forum (GRF) took place. It was a watershed moment in terms of fostering solidarity with the world’s refugees and the communities that welcome them.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, often known as the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation in charge of the lives of refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced individuals and communities around the world. The non-governmental organisation works to protect the basic human rights of individuals who have been forcibly displaced around the world, as well as to assist them in obtaining the basic requirements of life, such as shelter, food, clothing, drinking water, medical care, and so on. The organisation is associated with different smaller bodies at the global and local level to help refugees resettle in third world countries, find solutions to their problems, and make sure that the forcibly displaced people are not involuntarily sent back to their homeland. The organisations work together in areas ranging from capital urban areas to remote camps and border areas. UNHCR ensures the legal and physical rights of the displaced and strives to protect them by minimising the threat of violence, including sexual assault, which women and children are largely subjected to. The UN Refugee Agency promotes refugee status through a variety of campaigns and support, as well as through improving administrative and judicial authorities and institutions, educating government and non-government agency workers, and so on. UNHCR is also involved in law research and advice, regulating people who have been forcibly displaced, providing technical and financial support to institutions developing refugee law courses, and supporting human rights and refugee rights organisations, legal aid centres, and non-governmental organisations interested in the protection of refugees and forcibly displaced people and communities.⁶

The UNHCR operates in 134 countries and 546 locations around the world. From Eastern Europe to the Middle East, Latin America to the East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes, there is something for everyone. Burkina Faso, Liberia, Senegal Multi-Country Office, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Malawi, and others are among the nations covered by UNHCR.⁷

THE IMPACT OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS ON A COUNTRY

Approximately 79.5 million people are displaced around the world today. Since 2011, the number has risen by 70. More than half of the world's refugees (56%) originate from just six countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia, and Sudan, where the number of refugees from Syria, South Sudan, and Myanmar has risen dramatically in recent years. Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Burundi are the top ten countries contributing to refugees. Syria accounts for a quarter of the world's refugee population. As of mid-2020, 6.6 million refugees had sought refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey, primarily in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey. Afghanistan is well-known for being the world's second-largest producer of refugees, with more than 88 percent of those sheltered by neighbouring nations being Afghans. Afghanistan is now home to one out of every ten refugees. In Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya, there are around 2.3 million South Sudanese. The bulk of refugees are helped by these ten countries, who then seek safety in neighbouring countries. Turkey, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Uganda alone house about half of the world's 26 million refugees. The Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe Central Asia, and South Asia are the regions of the world that host the greatest number of refugees. Accepting people of other religions, races, castes, sects, and other groups can have both positive and negative consequences for a country. While these asylees have a lot of energy to start their new lives, hosting displaced persons from other countries could strengthen the host country. Looking back through history, some of the most prominent and inspiring people were refugees who were persecuted in their home countries and had to flee to protect themselves and their families from horrific torture. They were given the opportunity to rebuild their lives in the new country, and they flourished as valuable members of society. These world-famous people contributed to their respective fields of work and changed the global perspective. Albert Einstein was one such refugee who changed the fundamentals of time, space, and gravitation. He, along with his family, fled Germany to protect themselves from the Nazi attack. Sergey Brin, a computer scientist who fled the Soviet Union along with his family at the age of six, went on to become a co-founder of Google. Madeleine Albright, who fled the 1948 Czechoslovak coup d'état and settled in the United States later, started her life in Denver. She went on to become the first woman to serve as a secretary of state in the US. Henry Kissinger, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, arrived in New York in 1938. He graduated from Harvard University and went on to serve as a US security advisor and secretary of state. Other eminent personalities who were refugees are Bob Marley, Freddie Mercury, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Mario Stanic, Jackie Chan, Dalai Lama, Mila Kunis, etc.⁸

Many organisations throughout the world are working to ensure the survival of refugees. Many organisations, such as Refugees International Japan, focus on providing health care, education, and economic opportunities to those who have been displaced. Hope Ofirih and the Darfur Women's Network, for example, give medical care and a means of survival to refugees. The International Humanistic Psychology Association, for example, works extensively to provide psychological support to Syrian refugee children in Jordan, whereas Aid Afghanistan for Education works to unlock the potential of young Afghans from marginalised backgrounds, such as former refugees and child brides, through education as a means of preparing them for future. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) was established in September 2016 at a high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in response to UNHCR's comprehensive set of commitments. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) lays out a set of best practices for dealing with future emergencies. It entails easing pressure on host countries that welcome refugees, developing self-sufficiency programmes for refugees, expanding access to refugee resettlement in third-world countries or providing them with modern pathways, and, finally, fostering conditions that allow refugees to return to their home countries voluntarily. Working together for the upliftment of refugees is a joint obligation of the government, institutions, and organisations at the local and global levels.

The Rohingya Crisis: A Stark Example of the Global Refugee Challenge

The Rohingya crisis stands as one of the most severe and protracted refugee emergencies in recent history. Originating from Myanmar's Rakhine State, the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority, have faced decades of systematic discrimination, statelessness, and violent persecution. Denied citizenship by Myanmar's 1982 nationality law, the Rohingya have been rendered one of the largest stateless populations in the world, struggling for recognition and basic human rights. In 2017, a brutal military crackdown, described by many international observers as ethnic cleansing, forced over 700,000 Rohingya to flee their homes. The majority sought refuge in neighboring Bangladesh, creating one of the largest refugee camps globally in Cox's Bazar. This sudden displacement placed enormous strain on host communities and international humanitarian systems. The Rohingya crisis highlights key aspects of the modern refugee phenomenon: the intersection of ethnic persecution, statelessness, and geopolitical complexities. Despite international condemnation, the path to a durable solution remains fraught with challenges, including Myanmar's reluctance to acknowledge the Rohingya's rights, security concerns in host countries, and limited global political will. Addressing the Rohingya crisis requires a multifaceted approach — immediate humanitarian aid, protection of refugees' rights, diplomatic engagement for safe and voluntary repatriation, and long-term measures to resolve statelessness. It underscores the broader need for international cooperation and robust legal frameworks to protect displaced populations worldwide and prevent such crises from recurring.

The Ukraine Refugee Crisis: A Contemporary Humanitarian Challenge

The Ukraine refugee crisis represents one of the largest and most rapidly evolving displacement emergencies in recent decades. Triggered by the armed conflict following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes, seeking safety both

within Ukraine and across international borders. The scale of displacement is staggering. According to United Nations data, over 8 million Ukrainians crossed into neighboring countries such as Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Moldova within the first year of the conflict. Additionally, millions more are internally displaced within Ukraine, uprooted from their communities by ongoing violence. This mass movement of people has tested the capacity of regional and global humanitarian systems. What distinguishes the Ukraine refugee crisis is the rapid and extensive international response, especially from European nations, which enacted unprecedented measures such as the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive. This provided immediate legal status, access to employment, education, and healthcare for displaced Ukrainians, reflecting a significant shift in refugee policy within Europe. Despite this response, challenges remain. Refugees face uncertainties regarding their long-term status, integration into host societies, and the psychological trauma of war and displacement. The crisis also exposes vulnerabilities in humanitarian aid delivery amid the ongoing conflict, security risks, and logistical hurdles. The Ukraine refugee crisis underscores the complex interplay of armed conflict, displacement, and international protection mechanisms. It calls for sustained global solidarity, comprehensive policy frameworks, and inclusive approaches to refugee assistance, ensuring that displaced populations receive not only immediate safety but also opportunities for rebuilding their lives.

The Palestinian Gaza Refugee Crisis: A Persistent Humanitarian Challenge

The Palestinian refugee crisis in Gaza remains one of the longest-standing and most complex displacement situations in the world today. Rooted in the mid-20th century conflicts that led to the establishment of the State of Israel, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes, with many settling in the Gaza Strip and surrounding areas. Today, Gaza is home to over 1.4 million registered Palestinian refugees under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), many living in densely populated camps under dire conditions. The ongoing blockade of Gaza, recurrent conflicts, and economic hardships have compounded the vulnerability of Palestinian refugees, exacerbating their lack of access to basic services such as clean water, healthcare, education, and adequate housing. The restricted movement due to the blockade severely limits opportunities for employment and humanitarian aid, deepening poverty and food insecurity. Recent escalations in violence have led to further displacement within Gaza, as families are forced to flee from airstrikes and ground operations, often seeking shelter in UN facilities or with relatives. The densely populated nature of Gaza, combined with limited safe zones, makes internal displacement particularly precarious and difficult to manage. The Palestinian refugee situation in Gaza highlights the intertwined nature of protracted displacement, political conflict, and humanitarian need. It illustrates the challenges faced by refugees who are caught in cycles of violence without durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement. Addressing this crisis demands sustained international engagement, protection of civilian populations, and renewed efforts towards a just and lasting resolution that respects refugees' rights and dignity.

CONCLUSION

Today, every country is facing the problem of refugees. It is because of some peculiar inhumane activities by a few countries that make other nations obligated to rescue the marginalised sect on humanitarian grounds. The governments of these nations are dutiful to honour the humanitarian right of protecting every person's right within their territory. It is their duty to ensure the safety, both legal and physical, of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants and establish norms to ensure that these displaced people are not tortured, discriminated against, or left living in destitution and hardship. They are responsible for properly processing the claims of the asylum seekers so that they are not left in an impoverished state, kept in detention centres, exploited, or trafficked.

We aspire to a society where people living in jeopardy have an opportunity to rebuild themselves and establish themselves as valuable members of society. In a globalised world, sharing responsibility for global issues seems like a fair thing. By protecting the lives of these innocent people, we as a society are moving towards our goal of a civilised welfare state based on humanitarian grounds. It is necessary that governments ensure that all refugees are treated in accordance with international human rights law, including the laws based on the principle of non-refoulement. Refugees are not a burden on nations but rather a resource. These ill-fated people are full of life and enthusiasm to start a new chapter, putting their unfortunate past behind them. This is the biggest advantage for the host countries, as their hunger to prosper can strengthen a nation and contribute to its boom.

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