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# ISSUE DESCRIPTION

COMMITTEE Human Rights Council

ISSUE Enhancing the Process of Asylum Seeking and Combating the Refugee Crisis

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## Introduction

Even though there is no clear starting point for the current refugee crisis, its devastating effects on the countries of origin due to the causes, on the lives of the displaced people, on the host countries and their communities participating in tackling the issue are alarming and calling for immediate action.

The number of currently registered refugees worldwide is nearly 38 million, not including about 8 million asylum seekers and another 5.8 million people in need of international protection. Besides them, there are 72 million internally displaced individuals contributing to a total number of 122.6 million forcibly displaced persons registered around the globe.

Nowadays, there are about fifty ongoing conflicts around the world involving as many as 92 countries. Climate change is causing extreme weather conditions. Basic human rights and freedom are violated in several countries. The aforementioned factors all contribute to the protracted refugee crisis.

Individuals displaced due to circumstances putting them at risk encounter hardships while trying to get to a safe country. Migration is made more difficult due to the infrastructure not being ready for the transportation of so many people. Furthermore, about 75 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted in developing countries, who do not have enough resources to care for them properly and help their integration into their society. Besides, waiting times for asylum seekers can get extremely long while authorities are overburdened. What is more, these forcibly displaced people cannot return to their home countries in a reasonable time due to the prolonged conflicts. To preserve the basic human rights and to ensure that everyone is provided the opportunities for development, the issue at hand is crucial to be addressed.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Refugee** - By the definition of the United Nations a refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it". They have a right to international protection.

**Asylum Seeker** - By the definition of Amnesty International "an asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognised as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim."

**Migrant** - The term migrant has no internationally accepted definition, however, according to Amnesty International they can be characterised as "people staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum seekers or refugees". Reasons for emigration can include work opportunities, studying, joining a family, poverty, political unrest, natural disasters and more. Even though many people do not fit the legal definition of refugee, they could be exposed to danger if returning home.

**UNHCR** - "UNHCR stands for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also known as the UN Refugee Agency. It was created in 1950 to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes during the Second World War. Today, UNHCR protects and assists millions of displaced and stateless people around the world."

**Process of Asylum-Seeking** - The process in which people who are forced to leave their homes due to persecution, war or other circumstances threatening their lives or freedom apply in a host country to be legally recognised as refugees.

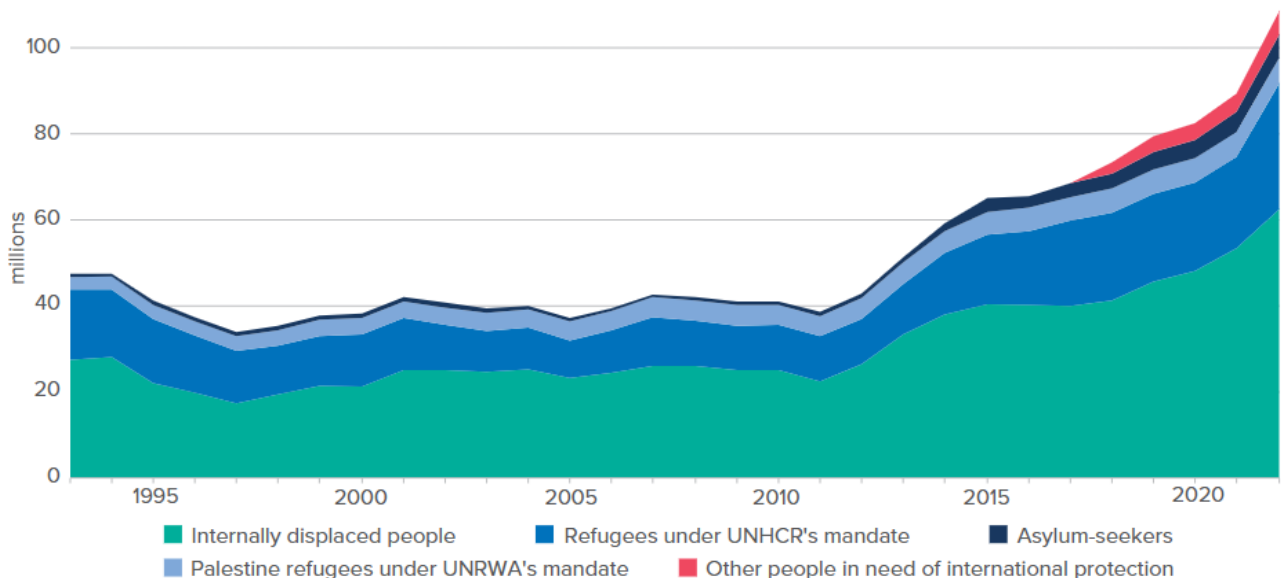
**Refugee Crisis** - The mass internal and international displacement of people from areas of conflict, violence, persecution, disasters due to climate change, famine or other conditions violating their rights granted by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, causing host countries to struggle to make supplies and support get to the people in need due to being overburdened.

## General Overview

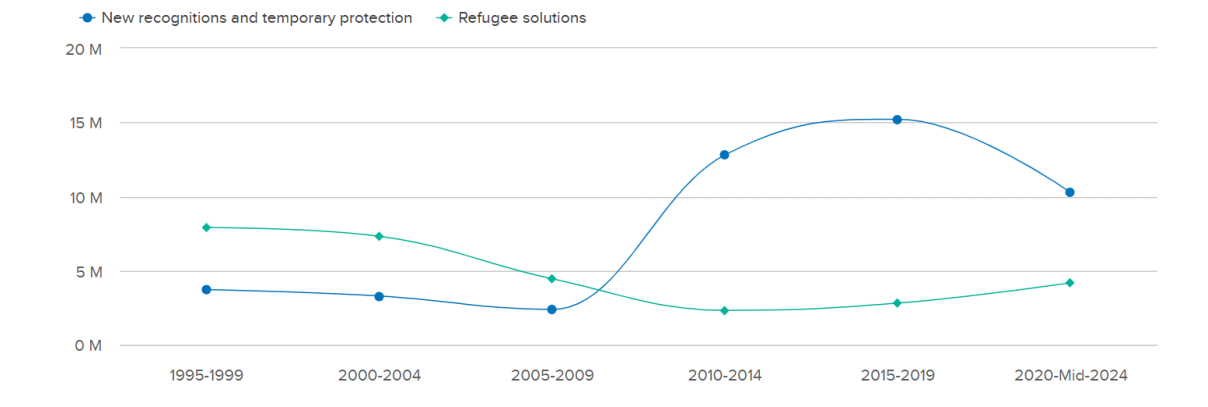
### HISTORY OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The refugee crisis was first acknowledged as an issue after the Second World War. The post-war conditions indicated the need for a refugee agency, thus in 1950 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established. Since the following year, records of refugees have been made keeping count of at least 1.6 million refugees each year. This figure started to increase in the 1960s and 1970s due to the large-scale and prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Vietnam as well as a number of small, localised ones. In the 1980s and 1990s, a further increase was attributed to the large displacements from Iraq, Rwanda and Yugoslavia. Since then, the number of refugees under the UNHCR's protection has rarely fallen below 10 million. The tipping point of the crisis was in 2013 due to the escalation of the conflict in Syria. From 2012 to 2013 the number of registered Syrian refugees experienced an increase of almost 250%. By 2014, the number of refugees worldwide exceeded 14 million and in 2023 reached 43 million - more than triple of that a decade earlier. This increase was also enhanced by the conflicts in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2016, and the Rohingya crisis, a religion-based discrimination in Myanmar in 2017. The recently renewed conflicts in Afghanistan, Sudan and Ukraine also led to massive displacements.

Figure 3 | People forced to flee | 1993 – 2022



**Forced displacement and durable solutions of refugees by half-decade | 1995 – mid-2024**



## REASONS FOR DISPLACEMENT

The mass displacement and the forced migration of people are triggered by several factors, out of which the most prevalent one is conflict. People seek to leave their home country in times when they can no longer feel safe and protected by their government. Not only them, but their homes and workplaces can suffer damage making it impossible for them to make a living as before. According to the UNHCR, approximately three-quarters of the refugees originate from countries heavily impacted by conflict, namely Afghanistan, Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine and South Sudan. Furthermore, other forms of violence can be a driving force including discrimination based on gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, political opinion, persecution or fundamental violation of basic human rights. Another example is gang violence which disturbs public safety. Moreover, climate change causes severe harm to the environment and the people living there. Its effects can be observed worldwide, traverse the globe and sometimes act indirectly. Unfortunately, affected regions usually comprise low-income territories where the re-establishment of their former life is completely impossible for the inhabitants after an extremely heavy rainfall, drought or extensive landslide. In some cases, the crops are affected putting the residents in grave danger. Hunger and famine not necessarily related to climate change are also one of the major driving forces of migration and asylum-seeking.

## STRUGGLES OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Sadly, displaced people need to face barriers even after leaving their home country in order to find peace and safety. These individuals usually do not have sufficient funds and do not possess the required pieces of information to travel to their destination securely. When escaping from

conflict in regions such as Asia or Africa, asylum seekers usually set off on foot or rarely by car to reach the border of a neighbouring country. Rivers and mountain ranges can create natural barriers besides other environmental threats, and access to nutrition and sanitation becomes strongly limited. Some borders can be crossed easily, a few even without any documentation, however, in other cases, help is required. In those instances, people may fall victim to traffickers or illegal transporters. After all these struggles, they can find themselves detained by authorities as soon as they reach a new country or are deported from it.

If asylum seekers are lucky enough to get into a new country and obtain their refugee status, they will be facing a number of new challenges. As most of these host countries are low- or middle-income ones or struggle from a conflict themselves, they cannot provide the supplies and support the refugees need. Basic services such as camps are unavailable in certain states. The integration process can also be hindered by the refugees' lack of qualifications and inability to speak the local language. In the worst-case scenarios, they are also challenged by racism or other forms of discrimination and are victims of forced or child labour and exploitation. While the ultimate aim is to enable refugees to move back to their home countries after the conflict has been resolved, this has been happening at a much lower rate than their number has been growing. That is because current conflicts have been lasting for years or decades now and do not seem to come to an end soon, meaning that newer generations are born in the host countries and grow up as refugees, if lucky in camps.

## Major Parties Involved

**Syria:** Syria currently experiences the world's largest refugee crisis and represents almost 25% of the global refugee population. The crisis began in March 2011 as a result of a violent government crackdown on public demonstrations supporting teenagers arrested for anti-government graffiti. Demonstrations sparked by the arrest were violently suppressed by the government leading to a civil war in the country. There are currently 6.49 million Syrians registered as refugees, 70 per cent of whom are living in poverty, and 7.25 million Syrians have been displaced internally. More than 80 per cent of the refugees have sought asylum in the neighbouring five countries: Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Millions of them are increasingly unable to meet their basic needs including access to clean water, electricity, food, medicine and paying rent. 70 per cent of the population in Syria is in need of humanitarian assistance, and 90 per

cent are living below the poverty line. The recent earthquake and the lately escalated Lebanon crisis caused further damage to the Syrians. In the country, 4 million children are either out of school or at risk of dropping out, many of whom have already fallen victim to child labour, most dominantly in Lebanon.

**Afghanistan:** The Afghans have suffered more than 40 years of conflict, natural disasters, poverty, food insecurity and a recent changeover in government authorities. The Taliban's takeover in August 2021 intensified instability and violence in the country. The number of Afghan refugees reported globally is around 6.4 million, most of whom are hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Half the population of more than 40 million people face acute food insecurity while 23.7 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The country currently hosts around 3.2 million internally displaced persons. 2.9 million children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition and this situation is expected to be worsened by natural disasters such as floods, drought and earthquakes.

**Ukraine:** On February 24, 2022, a full-scale war began in Ukraine following the Russian Federation's invasion of the country. Missile and rocket attacks caused damage to homes, businesses and energy infrastructures across the country resulting in the disruption of public access to water, electricity, heating, healthcare, education and social protection. The damages suffered by residential buildings pose life-threatening risks to the dwellers in case of extremely cold temperatures. Since the beginning of the war, 4 million people have been displaced within the country and 6.8 million persons fled from Ukraine, mainly to Germany and Poland, but also to neighbouring countries such as Hungary and Moldova. Particularly vulnerable groups comprise elderly people and persons with disabilities as they are unable to leave their homes in high-risk areas.

**European Union:** Asylum seekers arrive in the countries of the European Union coming from Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries torn apart by war, conflict or persecution. Thousands of them arrive at the shores of Italy, Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Malta year after year. The most recent emigration wave from Ukraine consisted of mainly females and children, the majority of whom have higher education or college degrees. Many countries in the EU struggle with these large numbers of asylum seekers or are not able to help them properly.

**Germany:** Until the end of 2023, 3.2 million refugees have been admitted to the country. The largest refugee population is that of the Ukrainians of 1 million individuals, followed by the Syrians. Approximately another 1 million people reside in the country temporarily or waiting for the acceptance of their asylum application. Germany has been providing assistance to internationally displaced persons in numerous ways including the identification and registration of refugees, documentation support, legal aid, counselling, and vital protection activities such as prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. The country has been pioneering in the support of higher education for refugees.

**Latin America:** The most affected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are Venezuela, Peru and Mexico, mainly due to natural disasters. Displacements due to conflicts were recorded in Columbia, Haiti, El Salvador and Mexico. Meanwhile, researchers found that international displaced persons in the region promoted economic growth in the host countries by filling up important gaps in local labour markets.

**Africa:** Conflicts, extremely dry weather conditions and thus famines force many people in African countries to leave their homes and find shelter in other regions or states. Highly affected countries include South Sudan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Eritrea.

## Timeline of Events

**December 14, 1950** - The UNHCR was established by the General Assembly. It was intended to get a three-year mandate to help Europeans displaced by the Second World War but has been operating ever since then.

**1951** - The UNHCR started keeping records on the number of refugees.

**1951** - The UN published the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

**1960s and 1970s** - Conflicts in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Vietnam leading to an increased number of refugees worldwide

**1980s and 1990s** - Large displacements from Iraq, Rwanda and Yugoslavia



**1998** - The UN published the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

**17 December 2018** - The United Nations General Assembly approved the Global Compact on Refugees aiming to tackle the refugee crisis by international cooperation with equitable responsibility-sharing.

**March 2011** - The outbreak of the Syrian civil war

**2013** - The tipping point of the refugee crisis

**2016** - Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo

**2017** - Escalation of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar

**February 24, 2022** - The beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war

**2023** - The Global Refugee Forum resulted in an estimated \$2.2 billion in new financial commitments to ease the situation.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

As well as the United Nations, governments and non-governmental organizations have been involved in tackling the issue for decades. Civilian activists are present in the affected countries providing support and aid in the forms of food supply and humanitarian services.

The UN Refugee Agency has been providing humanitarian aid to the people in need. In Syria, shelter, life-saving supplies, clean water, hot meals and medical care are provided to families who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. In addition to that, civilian infrastructure has also received assistance in repairing damage including family homes, school facilities and recreation centres.

The Afghan refugees and displaced people receive help from the UNHCR as well. They are provided with food, shelter, health care, water, sanitation support and cash assistance. The organisation provided life-saving support to almost one million people during the Taliban takeover and has been assisting the returning of individuals if found safe.

In 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees was approved by the General Assembly. The aim was to create a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing and to recognise that the refugee crisis can only be solved with international cooperation. The compact included four key objectives which are: easing the pressure on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions and supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

In 2023, the Global Refugee Forum was held, designed to practically implement the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. The event resulted in more than 1600 pledges supporting the refugees and their host communities as well as new financial commitments.

## Possible Solutions and Approaches

In order to fully tackle this issue, the root causes must be addressed and eliminated because otherwise, any solution will only be temporary and then the devastating effects of the refugee crisis will strike again. During that, assistance should be provided to everyone in need and alternative options should be available when it comes to settling down enabling the refugees to return to their home country or settle down in any of their choice.

International cooperation should be achieved in protecting basic human rights and preventing their violations. Any kind of persecution and discrimination shall be condemned and should be looked at in this way by every nation. Political conflicts should be addressed in the form of debates and not armed attacks.

Although most of the refugees are eager to return to their home countries after the end of the conflict or after the ruins have been restored, some would be glad to settle down in the host country permanently. To promote this opportunity the process of asylum-seeking should be advanced such that it takes a shorter time but ensures that everyone in need gets the proper assistance. By this the temporary displacement of refugees can be enhanced as well, making the host country's economy more durable to an influx of asylum seekers.

In the fight against the refugee crisis, the role of NGOs is crucial as well. While governments of countries should be focusing on achieving international peace, refugee populations must receive the required aid for a standard level of living. The support of local communities is unfortunately not enough for the long run, while the situations are settled, therefore the NGOs need to organise campaigns throughout the whole country aiming to collect food, clothing items, sanitary products and other necessities of life. This way proper housing of the refugees can be

ensured enabling them to return to their home countries ready for rebuilding their lives if they wish so.

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