The Plight of Refugees: Journey of Dilemma A Journey Towards Home or a Journey Towards Destiny

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Abstract

Refugees are ordinary people who live through extraordinary times in a country where conflict or persecution have put them at risk. They have no other choice but to flee and leave their country to seek safety; this means leaving a lot behind, one of the most complex decisions a person can ever take. So what makes a person a Refugee? From where do they come? Furthermore, where are they going? And how is the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office helping them? Refugees frequently flee with nothing more than the clothing on their backs, abandoning their daily lives. They may lose their home, savings, jobs, and, more often than not, their families and loved ones. The journey to safety can be long and full of dangers. During the journey, people can get hurt, and unfortunately, many people die; all of this can create serious trauma. In this article, let us look at the journeys people are leaving and which they are arriving in. And what destinies await them.

Keywords: Refugee, UNHCR, Rights, Journey, Non-Refoulement, Resettlement, Displacement

Introduction

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people are forced from their homes due to war, natural disasters, persecution, or other horrific circumstances. Refugees have crossed at least one border and are no longer in their home nation. If they return, they may face persecution because of their nationality, race, or sexual orientation, or because they associate with a religion, a society, or a political view, as a result of ongoing conflict. Some people are imprisoned or harmed physically or mentally. According to UNHCR, the number of 850 lakhs people flies by mid-2021, the highest level that the organization has seen in its 70 years of existence. In addition to the strain put on refugees by the COVID-19 pandemic. In that 480 lakhs people are currently displaced within their own country. A further 300 lakhs people have become asylum seekers or refugees, often travelling hundreds of thousands of miles to a new country before they can find somewhere to rest. This alarming number is up significantly compared to recent years.
Unpreventable Displacements

Refugees can come from anywhere in the world. They are people of all walks of life fleeing conflict and persecution; more than half of the world’s refugees are from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and South Sudan. These countries have been affected by Civil War and conflict for many years. The number of people who have had to flee their homes because of War or prosecution is higher now than any other point since the Second World War. New conflicts have been erupting, and some old conflicts are yet to be solved; this prevents people from returning home.

Most refugees live in urban areas in their host country; they rent in towns and cities and try to provide for their families. Others live in Refugee camps or improvised shelters where living conditions can be equally challenging. Some refugees have to stay in camps for years or even decades. Today most refugees can be found in Africa and regions like the Middle East and South Asia; only a relatively small number can be found in industrialized regions, like North America, Europe, and Australia. The great majority of refugees, nearly nine out of ten, live in developing regions. It means that some of the poorest countries in the world already face economic and social challenges of their own post huge Refugee populations. These are the imbalance in how refugee’s hosting of Refugees is distributed between countries worldwide.

South America

In South America with Venezuela, a nation that has seen nearly 48,78,000 people forced out of the country, the situation in Venezuela has been difficult for several years now, ever since oil prices dropped around 2014. As an oil-dependent country, Venezuela funded many of its social policies by selling oil. When oil prices dropped, Venezuela suffered the effects of hyperinflation. That coupled with an authoritarian power grab from the Venezuelan president, the pandemic’s effects have led to many people leaving the country for more stable ones. These displaced people primarily sought asylum in neighbouring countries with the most significant number, 17 lakhs ending up in Colombia and a further ten lakhs going to Peru, with large numbers also going to Chile, Ecuador, and Brazil, as well as a bunch of other Nations. The 94,000 headed towards Spain, and people are taking the route with the minimum number of people around 20,000 as Venezuelans have headed over 64 different countries.

Middle East

In Syria, with 68,04,541 refugees leaving the country in 2020 alone like Venezuela, Syria’s problems have come from nowhere. Since 2011, the country has been engaged in a brutal civil war. Many different actors were involved in this conflict, from Russia to the United States, and the death toll of this has been so hard to quantify that the UN even stopped counting in January 2014. However, they did suggest that in the year 2016, it could be around 4,00,000 people. However, the Syrian president has consolidated his power across much of Syria; the conflict continues in the Idlib region and drives more Syrians to flee their country. Those fleeing Syria are likely to end up in nearby nations with 36 lakhs people headed towards neighbouring turkey, and in fact, this is the most considerable flow of people in the entire World. 8,67,000 people also ended up in Lebanon, 6,63,000 in Jordan, and leading the European region, 6,43,000 people headed to Germany significant numbers also headed to Iraq, Egypt, Sweden, Sudan, and 117 other countries.

South Asia

Afghanistan is also the origin country for a vast number of refugees, with 28,38,469 people fleeing from the country. As we likely already know, Afghanistan has been engaged in civil conflict for decades now, then worsened when the Taliban gained a foothold throughout the region. Despite
countries like the US, the Taliban still control a large portion of Afghanistan. The US tried to sign a peace deal last year in which they pulled troops out of the country if the Taliban prohibited Al-Qaeda from operating. Suppose the Taliban entered into talks with the Afghani government. In that case, there is still a large amount of violence occurring throughout the country, with an estimated 8,000 civilian casualties between January and the end of September 2020, so it is understandable why people are fleeing. Of these refugees, the vast majority14 lakhs headed to Pakistan while 7,80,000 headed to Iran. Many European nations have also accepted Afghan refugees, including Germany, Turkey, Austria, France, Greece, and Sweden.

Though in South Asia, we see tens of thousands of people seeking refuge in India, having left Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Let us start with Sri Lanka; while there is no reason why people are fleeing the country, most of them seem to be Sri Lankan Tamils. In 2009, there was an intense civil war in Sri Lanka between the Tamils and the government, which the Tamils ultimately lost. There have been reports that Tamil forces (LTTE) were killed after they surrendered or were in the process of being taken into custody. Ever since, the Tamil ethnic group has faced discrimination, potentially being one of the most significant contributing factors for those deciding to flee the country.

Similarly, in Myanmar, discrimination against an ethnic group, in this case, the Rohingya, is likely why most people are fleeing. The UN attorney general has claimed that “they are one of the most discriminated people in the world” an excellent example of this is that the Myanmar government denies them citizenship and refuses to include them in the census. There have been incidents of violence against Rohingyas, which has contributed to the group’s decision to flee Myanmar. These issues led to refugees fleeing their respective countries. Those from Myanmar were most likely to head to Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and India. Those from Sri Lanka primarily went to India, where the smaller number also headed to France.

Africa

In the continent of Africa; the number of crisscrossing paths some significant hubs has many refugees fleeing, like Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, the democratic republic of Congo and South Sudan. However, there are other places where we find refugees crossing paths with countries like Nigeria, seeing 1,17,000 refugees fleeing to Cameroon and 64,000 going the other way from Cameroon to Nigeria. However, as is so often valid with Africa, this ultimately comes down to the borders and not the lines on top. These borders primarily drawn by colonial powers did not consider Tribal Borders, Ethnicities, or Faiths. The problems that sparked back then echo today, with people forced out and others forced in.

UN’s Role in Amelioration of Refugees

Many people and organizations provide help to refugees. In 1950 the United Nations created UNHCR, the office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Originally the refugee agency was only meant to exist for three months to help refugees from World War 2 in Europe. UNHCR’s role soon expanded to safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees and returnees stateless people and asylum seekers all over the world. UNHCR also provides humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons. UNHCR is the leading UN agency providing humanitarian assistance to refugees with around 10,000 staff members in over 120 countries in Refugee emergencies. UNHCR often teams up with other UN Agencies like the International Organisation for Migration, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the World Food Program. Each of them provides help to refugees in their specific areas of expertise.
Law and Rights that Protects Refugees

Refugees are fortunately protected by international law. They can’t be sent back to their nations if it puts their lives in danger. Countries have a legal obligation to let refugees in and protect them, but even in a safe country, life as a Refugee can be daunting; refugees may continue to deal with trauma. Some are separated from their family and extended to reunite with loved ones. There may be challenges related to adapting to a new environment; host countries can learn the language and adapt to cultural and other differences. However, when does someone stop being a Refugee? Some refugees can return home if the situation in their country becomes safe enough; others will remain and integrate with their host countries. With the proper support, refugees can successfully integrate and make a new life for themselves. Some refugees eventually even become a citizen of their host country.

Throughout history, millions of refugees have benefited from Refugee rights and international support. Many owe their lives to the system of international protection. After World War 2, countries from all over the world agreed to grant fundamental rights to refugees. These rights were established in the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees. So, what rights does this convention provide? One of its most important principles is that people cannot be sent back to their country of origin. Suppose this puts them at risk because of conflict or persecution. In that case, this principle is known as ‘non-refoulement.’ After non-refoulment, a border Refugee has the right to remain in safety in another country. This right includes more than just physical safety. Refugees should receive at least the same rights and basic help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident; these rights include freedom of thought of moment and freedom from torture and degrading treatment. The Refugee Convention also grants refugees social and economic rights in the host country. These include the right to work and access education, the right to provide for themselves and their families, and the right to access Health services. Some will be able to return home if the situation in their country becomes safe again; those who cannot return remain. They can integrate with their host countries and try to get on with their lives. They learn the language, go to school, get a job, and sometimes, they will even become citizens of their host country depending on their situation. Some Refugees may be transferred from the first country of asylum to another country in a process called ‘resettlement.’ Resettle refugees go through a very rigorous selection process involving UNHCR and the receiving country.

Conclusion

The UN family is not the only helping hand; hundreds of Local, National, and International NGOs help refugees. Meanwhile, States and international organizations assist with specific aid programs; together, all of these organizations offer a wide range of vital services for refugees. They provide protection, shelter, food, and health care. They assist children and youth in accessing schools and education, like Tamil Nadu Government constructing home for homeless Tamil refugee and inclusion of Tamil Refugee as a Ration Card holders is the beginning of new Dawn. Appointment of Expert committee on Tamil Refugees by Tamil Nadu Government provides access to livelihoods and assists with integration.

Millions of people worldwide from all walks of life volunteer to help displaced people. They donate to charity or offer refugees a place to stay, donate clothes, provide language lessons, and many other forms of support. Whatever the scale, these kinds of initiatives can make a massive difference in refugees’ lives and assist them in making a new beginning. To conclude, “One who can’t be an escort, just be a route guide to the destiny seekers in their journey.”
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