



Forum: HRC
Issue: Establishing measures to ensure protection for refugee minors.



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Introduction:

Refugee crises have been an inherent and major issue all throughout history. During any unrest in the world, minority groups are always affected. 72% of refugees in the world, now, come from the same 5 countries (Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and South Sudan). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than half of these people are children, making them especially vulnerable. Due to their vulnerability, it becomes even more important to heed special attention to this issue. There are, of course, specific laws, guidelines and agreements made to protect this group of people, however, they are often obscure and ambiguous or not well enforced.

This debate will be focusing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis, which arises from years of conflict and civil unrest within Syria. It is known to be the largest refugee crisis, since 2011, marking the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. Until now, greater than 14 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced, whether internally or externally. Out of the 14 million refugees, 47% of them are minors, with more than 2 million children out of school. The lack of safety, education and accessibility to basic human resources exposes them to constant discrimination and violation of human rights. Syrian children are often victim to imprisonment, child labor and physical and sexual assault along with tremendous mental and emotional distress.

Definition of Key terms:

Refugee: “Someone who is outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection.”
(UNHCR – 1951 Convention)

Migrant: “Someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status.” (UNDESA)

Civil War: “A violent conflict between a state and one or more organized non-state actors in the state’s territory.” (Encyclopedia Brtiannica)

Paramilitary Force: A force formed on a military pattern, especially as a potentially auxiliary military force. (is often unofficial)

Authoritarian regime: Describing a regime in which blind submission to authority is required, often with the repression of individual freedom. (Encyclopedia Brtiannica)

Foreign Policy: General objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states. (Encyclopedia Brtiannica)

Liberalization: Refers to the loosening of government controls. In an economic sense, it refers to the reductions in the restrictions of international trade and capital.
(Encyclopedia Brtiannica)

Non-refoulement: Is a principle that guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm. This principle applies to all migrants at all times, irrespective of migration status. (OHCHR)

Wealth Disparity: Disparity in between the distribution of income throughout social classes. Often referred to as the “gap between the rich and the poor”.

Asylum: Asylum is a form of protection which allows an individual to remain in a host country instead of being removed (deported) to a country where he or she fears persecution or harm (UNHCR)

Islamophobia: A fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism which targets the symbols and markers of a being a Muslim. (OHCHR)

Background:

The Syrian Civil War began in March of 2011, when Syria's government encountered uprisings and pro-democracy protests throughout the country. President Bashar al-Assad, who became president of Syria in 2000 and has recently started his fourth seventh year tenure in 2021, overpowered these protests through violence and military and paramilitary forces. The Syrian government is officially a democratic and republican state, according to the constitution, however this is used to incompetently mask an authoritarian regime with repressed multi-party representation dominated by the al-Assad family since the 1970s.

Pro-democracy uprisings had been spreading throughout the Arab World prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, however, al-Assad considered Syria to be immune to this due to how his administration's stances on Israel and the United States aligned with

that of the general public, as opposed to a pro-Western foreign policy that was seen with leaders preceding al-Assad. Furthermore, Bashar al-Assad's rise to presidency was anticipated with hopes of modernization and reform, which were largely deficient.

It is important to recognize that the unrest in Syria was not only caused by political issues but was also due to economic and environmental problems. When assessed by macroeconomic indicators, such as GDP and GNP growth, the country seemed to be doing well. However, the issue was realized when assessed on a much smaller scale. As years passed, wealth disparity increased, despite the economic liberalization, largely overseen by al-Assad, along with poverty and unemployment rate. Furthermore, Syria experienced the worst drought in the country's modern history, a year before the start of the uprising. This four year-long environmental catastrophe only exacerbated poverty, especially among farmers, who, as a result, migrated to urban areas. Therefore, a combination of environmental, social, economic and political factors brought on the beginning of years of unrest.

5.5 million Syrian refugees now live in neighboring countries including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Moreover, non-neighboring countries have also hosted Syrian refugees. Germany has, most remarkably, hosted around 664,000 Syrian refugees since 2011.



Above is a visual depiction of the displacement of Syria's population

Almost half of Syrian refugees are under the age of 18, with some children even being born as refugees in the last decade. Not only does their age intensify their vulnerability, but so does the worsening water crisis and rise of water-borne diseases such as cholera in Syria and neighboring countries. These children often live in informal settlements and camps where they are often found separated from their families and communities with lack of a sustainable amount of resources. They are also prone to facing harassment, assault and suffering from injuries with inadequate medical care, education and just authorities. Even as asylum is reached, most suffer from acute mental and emotional trauma, making it harder for them settle in the host country. As of August 2019, more than 800,000 Syrian children remain out of school in host countries and more than 90% of Syrian refugees live in host communities that have pushed children to extreme survival actions such as refusing education to work or marry. Within Syria, conditions are even worse with schools being regularly

attacked and destroyed. This leads to one third of Syria's child population being out of school and many in danger of not continuing with education.

With such a large number of people in need of immediate support, consequently, many resources are required. Due to this, many countries have begun refusing to accept Syrian refugees. This is due to a variety of reasons including maintaining a demographic balance, foreign policy, and very often, Islamophobia. Many Syrians obtain work permits in other countries, but, over the years this has become increasingly difficult as reluctance to accepting refugees has increased. This leads to many families camping at borders, walking large distances to get to a safe haven and making dangerous and often fatal trips. Yet again, children are most affected.

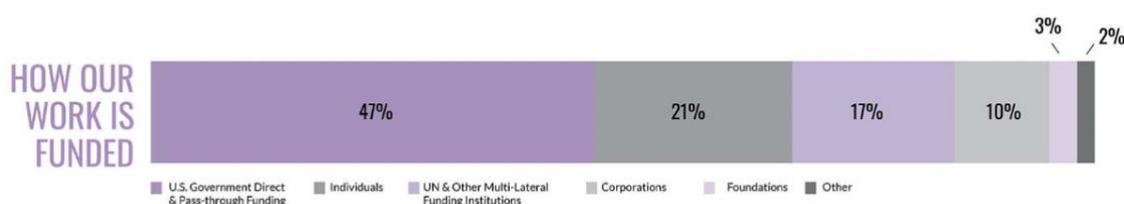
Major parties involved:

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): The main body of the United Nations related to Refugees. This is part of an international body with many governmental partners that help in funding. Examples of these include the USA, Germany, Norway, UK and European Union.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): UN Body created to provide emergency food and healthcare to children and mothers, originally for countries affected by World War 2. UNICEF is also largely funded by the European Union, the USA and Germany. Nevertheless, it receives contributions from 137 other government partners.

European Union (EU): The European Union is an intergovernmental organization that has been the largest provider of support towards Syrian refugees. They have pledged close to 25 billion euros to Syria since the start of the crisis and plan to only support further.

Save the Children: Save the Children is an international non-governmental organization. It has worked with Syria for the past 12 years providing emergency support in the form of education, food, healthcare and advocacy. It is largely funded by the US government and the United Nations.



United Nations World Food Program (UNWFP): A body of the United Nations that specifically focuses on providing food security to those in poverty and are mainly funded through donations.

Relevant UN treaties, resolutions, and reports:

1951 Refugee Convention (Geneva Convention):

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>

Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967):

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20606/volume-606-I-8791-English.pdf>

United Nations Convention in the Rights of the Child (1989):

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1996):

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

The Syrian Refugee Crisis stems from a much bigger issue that has not been solved for more than a decade. There are of course many hypothesized ways to solve the issue, however, this has never been fully completed. Most governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations have helped in trying to solve the refugee crisis by supporting the refugees and in any way possible. This, for many, has included donating, advocating and welcoming refugees into countries, and even their own homes. The UN has consistently pledged billions of

dollars since the start of crisis, along with the EU many other countries. Until the Syrian Civil War is solved, the refugee crisis cannot be solved. Moreover, this crisis has impacted the lives of so many that even after the Civil War ends, millions refugees and refugee children will still be in need of humanitarian assistance.

Possible solutions:

Ending the refugee crisis would consist of all countries involved working together and increasing support. Support comes in many forms and is often seen as emergency support. However, to create durable programme to actually end the Syrian refugee crisis, more attention should be given to the refugees to help reach asylum, and even after they have reached asylum. For example, non-refoulement should be enforced strictly and governments should help increase self-reliance of Syrian refugees, ensuring proper settlement into the host country. Furthermore, governments of wealthy countries must get more involved in the conflict, as well as the refugee crisis that ensues from it.

To increase self-reliance, countries must introduce programmes that help Syrian refugees integrate into the culture and society, improving their chances to earn a livable wage and provide a comfortable life for their families. With families not under the poverty line, children do not have to put themselves in dangerous situations to fend for their families. Refugees in host countries should be encouraged through government led programmes to learn the local language. Additionally, governments could offer short vocational trainings that provide necessary skills for its citizens and refugees, in turn helping the economy.

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