

A Letter from Your Chair and Co-Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2018 World Youth Summit! We are honored to serve as your Chair and Co-Chairs in the 2-day session of ECOSOC (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR) this year.

As you join this committee as a delegate for an assigned country, we expect you to read through the study guide, do further research on the policies and current situation regarding xenophobic reactions against refugees, especially those in your assigned country, to have better understanding of the issue, and thus the ability to discuss with other delegates and jointly find the best solution for this pressing issue together.

If you have any questions, or would like to share your thoughts on your working papers, or discuss different aspects of the issue with us, feel free to contact us and let us know. We hope this guide will point you to the right direction for research, which will in turn create the basis of interesting debates, fruitful discussions and innovative solutions to the problem of xenophobic reactions against refugees. We look forward to meeting all of you in person at the conference.

Sincerely yours,
Mad Hsi-Chien ZHOU
Charlene Tsi-Ting LIN
Sih-Yu WEI

TOPIC: Countering Xenophobic Reactions against Refugees

COMMITTEE: ECOSOC - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Committee Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, is a specialized organization that works under and cooperates with the United Nations through the UN Economic and Social Council. It is created to function as the lead and main coordination of international actions concerning the support and protection of refugees, and ultimately resolve the problems of refugees worldwide. UNHCR assists refugees in their voluntary return to country of origin, integration in new hosting country, or resettlement to a third country, and provides aid such as medical assistance, food supply, temporary shelter and other necessities for refugees.

2. Definition of Keywords

asylum seeker

A person who flees his or her country of origin, and formally applies for asylum in another state. The term is different from “refugee” in that it does not have a specific legal definition, and requires simply the action of application. An asylum seeker could be a refugee, a displaced person, or a migrant.

displaced person

A person who is forced or coerced to leave their home or home region. Forced displacement could take in the form of population transfer or deportation. If a displaced person is displaced within the same country, he or she is called an IDP (internally displaced person).

migrant

A person who attempts to permanently relocate to another country. To acquire a legal status in the destination country, such a person normally needs to apply for a resident visa or its equivalent, depending on the immigration law of the destination country at the time. A migrant’s application to live in the destination country may be turned down and when this happens the migrant may be sent back to his/her country of origin against his/her will.

non-refoulement

An elemental principle of international law which forbids receiving countries to return asylum seekers to countries that might cause them to be targets of persecution.

refugee

A displaced person who was forced to leave his or her country of origin, due to military conflicts, natural hazards, or persecution against religion, race, or political opinion, and who was granted official refugee status either by the hosting country or UNHCR.

xenophobia

Xenophobia is a political term describing the fear, distrust and/or hatred towards things or persons that are alien or foreign. It is not a medical phobia but a general feeling that often manifests under the concept of “us and them”. It includes fear of cultural change, identity loss, disloyalty of foreigners, chaos in political power, and so on. The degree of xenophobia could range from being mild such as comments that only evoke discomfort, or to the extremity that invite violent, harmful, even life-threatening actions.

3. Refugees: an Overview

3.1 a brief history of refugees

The term “refugee” was only specifically defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, following the creation of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1950, which is in part a response to the chaotic situation of post-war Europe and the Soviet Union. However, since the beginning of human civilization, the instances when people are in need of asylum in a foreign land have been present and constant, and there have been multiple known cases involving mass exodus.

In 17th century France, Louis XIV’s Edict of Fontainebleau outlawed Protestantism in France, in turn created hundreds of thousands of protestants called Huguenot to seek refuge in foreign countries such as England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa and Prussia. Starting from the 19th century, Muslim people began to move out of Europe and into Turkey; in the 19th to 20th century, a series of massacres against Jewish people in Europe caused mass Jewish emigration; and the Balkan Wars in early 20th century prompted 800,000 people to leave their home countries.

The first international effort concerning refugee issue was made with the formation of the High Commission for Refugees in the League of Nations in 1921, to deal with the problem of 1,500,000 people who fled Russia after the Revolution in 1917 and its subsequent civil war. However, in 1924, the United States of America passed an immigration act that prohibited Southern and Eastern Europeans, especially Jewish and Slavic people, to enter the country. The act was lifted only after the Second World War. Before and during the Second World War, the rise of Nazism in Germany and the following wars created a huge wave of refugees and unprecedented chaotic displacements in the region. In light of this, after the war, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was founded in 1946. Controversially, it does not concern “persons of German ethnic origin” who were expelled and made up the majority of refugees in desperate need for a host country at the time. Also, due to conflicts between the Western allies and the Soviet Union, the organization only functioned in areas under control of the former. The IRO was dissolved in 1952. UNHCR has since taken charge of most refugee issues, including the long-standing Afghan refugee problem since 1979, the recent crisis of South Sudan and Syria, and other refugee problems which call for international effort for solutions.

3.2 current refugee situation in the world

From the UNHCR’s 2016 statistics, there are currently about 22.5 million refugees around the world and the number is still increasing, with only less than 1% of these resettled in a new home. We are witnessing, at present, the highest level of displacement recorded in human history, and one of the most urgent humanitarian crises in the modern world. Currently over half of the refugees worldwide come from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan; other countries with

major refugee problems include Nigeria, Columbia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and so on; and still other stateless groups of people, such as the Rohingya people, are in desperate need for refuge. Some of these crises have been going on intermittently or continuously for several decades, while others have emerged and worsened rapidly in recent years. The countries hosting the most refugees include Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Iran. While Turkey hold more than 2 million refugees, the other three countries each host approximately 1 million refugees (see graphs below) and the numbers are growing.



Source: UNHCR / 19th June 2017

4. Types of Xenophobic Reactions Against Refugees

4.1 as a cause for mass exodus

Wars, conflicts, and natural disasters are all common reasons that force people to flee their homeland and become refugees; yet it should be noted that persecution imposed by the home government, for reasons of religious, ethnic and cultural differences, and by means of discrimination, segregation, hate crimes and ethnic cleansing, is also a prevailing cause for mass exodus. Xenophobia is a serious problem that could exist within a country and causes the country's own citizens to become exiles. Governments in certain countries use legislations to strip specific cultural or religious groups of their citizenships, which causes them to become stateless people. As a result, they are deprived of their basic human rights, such as personal liberty, the rights to receive education, acquire a job, or get married. The refugees who fled their countries of origin to escape xenophobic reactions against them are some of the most vulnerable minorities in the world, because for them returning to homeland is no longer an option.

4.2 before resettlement

Before being able to resettle permanently in a host country, most refugees are compelled to live in refugee camps along borders, travel to a foreign country, or stay in temporary asylum in transit countries. Refugee camps are usually set up on borders or the outskirts of nearby countries. The living conditions there are often sub-standard as they are frequently overcrowded and short of supplies. In addition, the lack of security in refugee camps regularly subject refugees to theft, rape, and violence. On their way to a new destination, refugees also risk being exploited by smugglers and human traffickers. Many die when they cross open seas or wilderness in order to find safety. Filippo Grandi of UNHCR expressed his outrage towards countries closing borders in 2016, saying

“the right to asylum is being undermined by xenophobia as well as nationalistic and political rhetoric intent on linking refugees with security concerns and terrorism.” This is an act that could be seen as an indirect violation of non-refoulement. Even when refugees manage to cross borders and reach safety temporarily, often they still suffer from crowdedness and lack of resources. Ironically but in reality, it is at this transit stage (neither in home country nor in destination country) when refugees may be most vulnerable – their risk of becoming victims of xenophobic reactions such as discrimination, deprivation of basic human rights, hate rhetorics, and hate crimes from locals and government officials, actually increase considerably as they travel without an official status, and thus with no “protector authority” at all.

4.3 after resettlement

The hardship refugees endure does not end after resettlement. The challenge begins as refugees try to integrate into a new society. Education, job opportunities, housing, health care, and cultural differences are all issues that need to be tackled by refugees and the locals in host countries together. However, the fear of identity loss, economic loss and cultural change, accompanied by lack of understanding, false media representation and provocative comments from right-wing politicians, often result into xenophobia that obscure these primary issues. Scapegoating, or assigning blame on refugees for low employment rate, terrorist attacks, and other preexisting problems, can lead to hate crimes involving physical assaults and verbal abuse, rhetorics of ethnic or cultural superiority, discrimination and social impediment. All these xenophobic reactions against refugees makes the task of adjusting to life in a new country even more difficult than it already is without all the hostility. One of the reasons for these xenophobic reactions, other than xenophobia, is the inability of the government of hosting countries to come up with effective policies that support resettlement as well as lessen the impact of refugees on its society. In fact, governments that manage to implement policies that systematically help refugees resettle, in the long run, stand a good chance to not only integrate refugees to their societies but also enrich their own societies culturally and economically.

5. What Has Been Done About It

5.1 international efforts

During the United Nation’s World Summit Special Session in 23 May, 2016, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson directly addressed the problem of xenophobia and call for those of influence to counter xenophobic reactions against refugees.

On September 19, 2016, UN’s New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants witnessed the agreement of all 193 member states of the UN to recognize the problem of refugees as an international problem and responsibility that need to be dealt with and taken by every country. The four objectives of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework that is set out in the New York Declaration include:

- Ease pressures on host countries;
- Enhance refugee self-reliance;
- Expand third-country solutions; and
- Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

The New York Declaration further emphasize the importance that “refugees should be included in the communities from the very beginning,” and the affirmation that the goal is to “help refugees thrive, not just survive.” Both ideas support that inclusion is key to an effective solution to refugee problems, and that the problem of xenophobic reactions against refugees must be tackled before such solution can work.

UNHCR has worked through the years to help refugees in their voluntary return to home countries, and strive to provide shelter, food supplies, medical support and so on, to refugees in temporary settlements, as well as language courses, cultural orientation, and access to education and employment that might aid refugees to better integrate into host countries if they are not able to return home.

5.2 case studies

Morocco so far has been a transit country for refugees, but is slowly becoming a destination for Syrian as well as sub-Saharan refugees. Morocco passed the National Policy on Immigration and Asylum in 2013, with the goal of offering protection for refugees. With assistance of the partnership between UNHCR and AMMAPPE (Moroccan Association for the Protection of Small Enterprises), cases of entrepreneur refugees creating jobs for both refugees and Moroccan locals have emerged. In 2016, Jordan, the host country of more than 650,000 Syrian refugees, became the first Arab country to reduce obstacles to the acquirement of work permits for Syrian refugees, by waiving the usual fees and loosening the requirements. A promise was made by the Jordanian government to create 200,000 job opportunities for refugees in the following years, in return for international loans, trade benefits and international investments that would be beneficial to the entire Jordanian population.

The 2017 Refugee Food Festival, the result of a collaboration between UNHCR and French NGO Food, Sweet Food, held in schools and restaurants in 13 different European cities, has served as an effective bridge for cultural understanding and a successful example of professional integration.

5.3 challenges ahead

The continuously rising number of refugees is an additional hardship imposed on the already complicated issue. The unresolved problems in the refugees' countries of origin make resettlement and integration the two more likely solutions, and in turn make countering xenophobic reactions against refugees even more crucial.

It should be noted that the countries hosting the most refugees in the world such as Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Iran, are all mid-to-low income or developing countries. This poses a serious problem since the excessive amount of refugees seeking asylum adds even greater economic burden and has substantial social impact on those countries, and might in turn create discontent among locals and result in inadequate asylum for refugees. Better coordination and collaboration within the international community may help the problem.

Furthermore, terrorist attacks often lead to security concern from governments and locals in hosting countries. Refugees tend to be blamed for being the reason or automatically become suspects to the attacks, further intensifying xenophobic sentiments. As a result, refugees might be subjected to hate crimes, involuntarily transferred, or denied entry without relevant background checks. These are all

harmful acts towards the refugees, and which might directly or indirectly cause the refugees to return to their countries of origin, where they are again subjected to persecution and mortal danger.

6. Questions to Consider

Countering xenophobic reactions is an immensely intricate task. It is not only about resolving personal prejudices, but also determining the systematic economic and social problems that emerge with the mass exodus of refugees once they leave their countries of origin and attempt to enter and establish a new life in a foreign land. Therefore, it is crucial to understand this issue in depth in order to find effective and lasting solutions.

- How can the international community and national governments collaborate to provide adequate and timely aid to refugees?
- How can the government of host country ensure the welfare, safety and integration of refugees after resettlement, without sacrificing economic growth and domestic social order?

7. Supplementary Reading

UNHCR - Global Trends

<http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>

UNHCR - New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

<http://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

OHCHR - Protecting the human rights of migrants and refugees

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/HCOpenLetterMigrantsAndRefugees.pdf>

8. References

UNHCR - Figures at a Glance

<http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

UNHCR - the 1951 Refugee Convention

<http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

UNHCR - Refugees can be a driver of development in Morocco

<http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/10/59f1d50a4.html>

UNHCR - New deal on work permits helps Syrian refugees in Jordan

<http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/10/59df254b4.html>

UNHCR - Refugee Food Festival has European diners asking for more

<http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/7/595f638d4/refugee-food-festival-european-diners-asking.html>

UNHCR - New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

<http://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

UNHCR - Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

<http://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>

UNHCR - Towards a global compact on refugees

<http://www.unhcr.org/towards-a-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

OHCHR - Protecting the human rights of migrants and refugees

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/HCOpenLetterMigrantsAndRefugees.pdf>

UNHCR - Global Trends

<http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>