

GA4: Humanitarian

Protecting Individuals in Refugee Camps from Physical and Mental Abuse

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Issue: Protecting Individuals in Refugee Camps from Physical and Mental Abuse

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Introduction

As new crises emerge in different countries across the world, people resort to methods that involve leaving their country to continue their lives, which has coined the term “refugee”. By 2022, approximately 103 million people are forcibly displaced, which only keeps increasing day by day. Today, there are more refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) than at any point since World War II. To host these refugees and accommodate their safety and settlement needs, refugee camps have been established across different parts of the world with the help of UN organs. However, the humanitarian situation in most refugee camps is catastrophic as they are overcrowded and also lack food, clean water, and sufficient toilets. In these grave conditions, the mental hardships refugees suffer in these camps are also an overlooked issue as there is no psychological support available in most cases. A total of 13.4 million people are dependent on humanitarian aid, and more than 12 million people do not know how to feed themselves. Currently, international organizations and governments affected by the issue work to mitigate the effects of physical and mental abuse of individuals in refugee camps. However, the issue remains unresolved given the increasing trend in the number of refugees in recent years and the growing demand for supplies to establish better conditions in refugee camps.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugee: People who are outside their home country for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): People who have been forcibly displaced but, unlike refugees, who remain within the borders of their home country.

Refugee Camp: A refugee camp is a temporary settlement built to receive refugees and people in refugee-like situations. Refugee camps usually accommodate displaced people who have fled their home country, but camps are also made for internally displaced people.

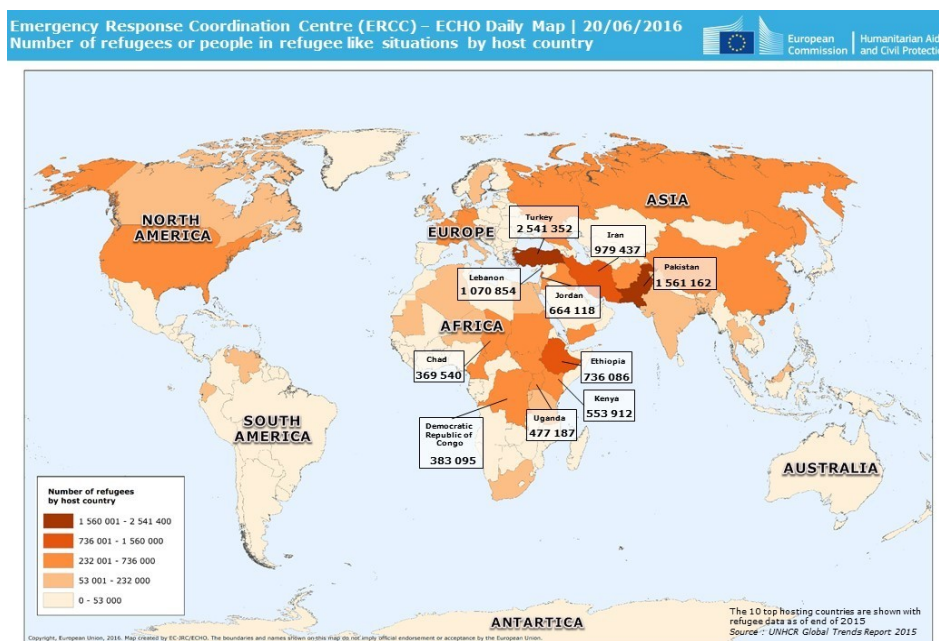
Humanitarian Aid: Humanitarian aid is material and logistic assistance to people who need help. It is usually short-term help until long-term help by the government and other institutions

replaces it. Among the people in need are the homeless, refugees, and victims of natural disasters, wars, and famines.

Asylum: By granting asylum to a refugee, a country accepts its obligation to protect the refugee against refoulement, to respect and safeguard the refugee's human rights, and to allow the refugee to remain in its territory until a durable solution is found.

General Overview

The trend in number of refugees worldwide is increasing. Of these refugees, a total of 13.4 million people are dependent on humanitarian aid, and more than 12 million people do not know how to feed themselves. Moreover, the conditions in which these refugees reside in refugee camps are dire given the lack of safety, food, shelter, clothing, and hygiene. Approximately 6 million refugees today reside in refugee camps, which only make up 22% of the total number of refugees worldwide, indicating a lack of place for other refugees to stay in.

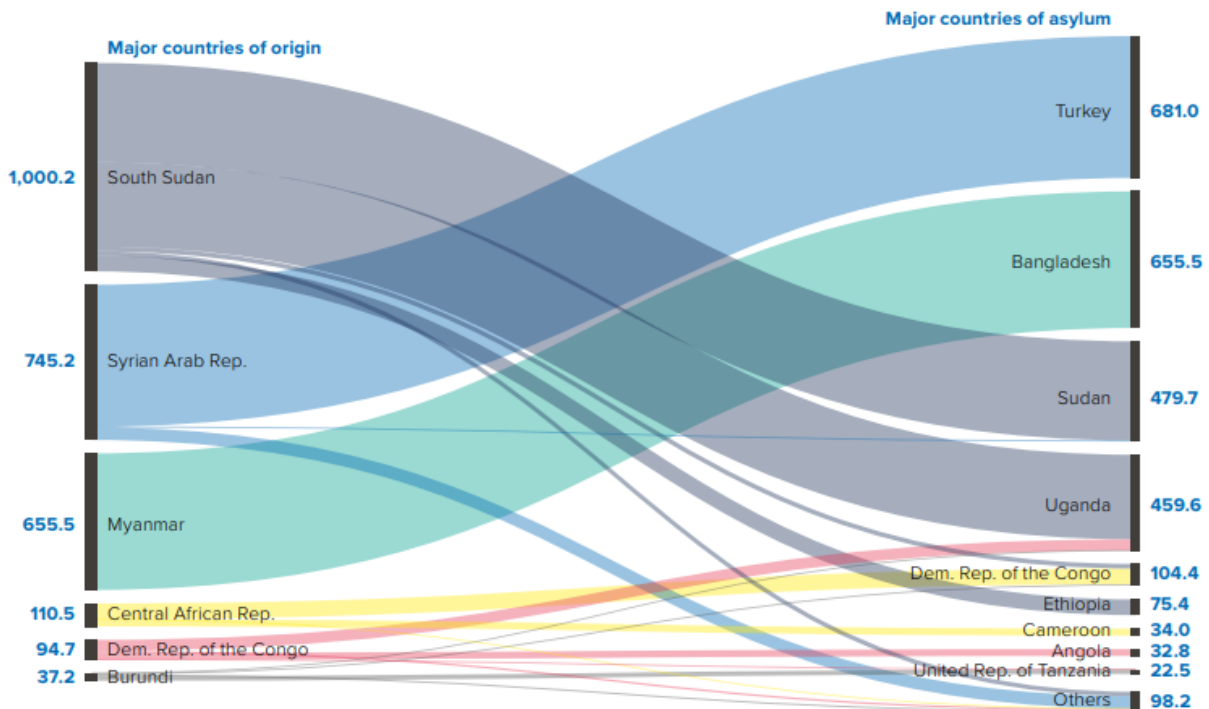


Of the people staying in refugee camps, almost half of them are children, which are either born as refugees or forcibly displaced from their homeland and therefore lack education. The refugees in camps reside in different points of the world including camps in Kenya, Jordan, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Pakistan. Resources in these camps are highly affected by surging violence in these countries and increased demand for primary needs given the increasing number of refugees worldwide. Although some camps contain preschools and education centers for children, these are not widely available to most refugees worldwide. Also, refugees escaping from

their homeland may be in need of psychological support as they may have fled from traumatic conditions including genocide, internal violence or forced displacement.

Figure 5 | **Where new refugees found asylum in 2017**²³
(No. of refugees in thousands)

More than 2.7 million people fled their homes to another country in 2017, the vast majority of whom (88 per cent) originated from just three countries (South Sudan, Syria, Myanmar) and found protection in bordering countries or their immediate region.



Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. UNHCR seeks to uphold the basic human rights of uprooted or stateless people in their countries of asylum or habitual residence, ensuring that refugees will not be returned involuntarily to a country where they could face persecution. The organization also helps refugees find solutions, by ways including sending them back to their homeland voluntarily, integrating in countries of asylum or resettling in third countries.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC): The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is an inter-agency forum of United Nations and non-UN humanitarian partners founded in 1991 to strengthen humanitarian assistance. The overall objective of the IASC is to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. IASC currently aids in solving the issue by

setting humanitarian guidelines for IDPs and providing humanitarian aid to affected populations in refugee camps.

Türkiye: Türkiye is host to the largest number of refugees worldwide, as the number of people forcibly displaced across the world due to conflict, violence, and persecution hit record levels. Türkiye currently hosts 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees along with 320,000 people of other nationalities. There are several Syrian refugee camps in Türkiye, most of which lack infrastructure and are unhygienic.

Colombia: There are currently millions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants living in Colombia, which comprises the largest refugee crisis in Latin America. Colombia is a country highly affected by violence and arms trafficking, and the internal conflict also poses a safety risk to refugees residing within the country.

Kenya: Kenya is host to several refugee camps, which include the Kakuma refugee camp, the largest refugee camp in the world. Established in 1992, the camp is jointly managed by the Kenyan Department of Refugee Affairs and UNHCR. Today, Kakuma is home to some 100,000 South Sudanese and 55,000 Somali refugees, most of whom were driven from their homelands by civil war. But the camp also hosts refugees from nearly 20 other countries. However, conditions in Kakuma are grave, as donor support has waned in recent years. The camp's resources and infrastructure are overtaxed, and occupants have scant opportunities for gainful employment or education.

Timeline of Events

1951	<i>The UNHCR Refugee Convention was held where the core principle of non-refoulement was established, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.</i>
1967	<i>The UNHCR Refugee Protocol, in line with the convention held in 1951, was established, setting international principles for refugees and asylum seekers.</i>
1984	<i>The term for refugees was set to include people who flee from their country for different reasons in the Cartagena Declaration.</i>
1992	<i>Kakuma Refugee Camp, the largest refugee camp in the world, was established.</i>

Treaties and Events

Cartagena Declaration: In 1984, a group of government representatives, academics and distinguished lawyers from Latin America met in Cartagena, Colombia, and adopted what became known as the Cartagena Declaration. Among other things, the Declaration recommended that the definition of a refugee used in the region should include, in addition to those fitting the 1951 Convention definition, persons who flee their country "because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol: The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the only global legal instruments explicitly covering the most important aspects of a refugee's life. According to their provisions, refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreign nationals in a given country and, in many cases, the same treatment as nationals. The 1951 Convention also recognizes the international scope of the refugee problem and the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in trying to resolve them.

1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1984. It completed the codification process to combat the practice of torture. The Convention absolutely prohibits torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Although the UN has outlined multiple principles for refugee treatment through conventions and treaties, protecting individuals in refugee camps gets harder and harder as new refugee crises arise in different parts of the world, increasing the number of displaced people worldwide and making it difficult to monitor them as the refugee camps they flee become too overcrowded. They may lack proper shelter, food, clothing, or sanitary material. Moreover, the refugees in these camps may be prone to violence in countries that have internal armed conflicts or those that combat bigotry and racism. Given these reasons, protecting individuals in refugee camps remains an unsolved issue in most parts of the world.

Possible Solutions

There are several ways in which conditions in refugee camps can be improved. Firstly, housing containers and nutrition may be supplied to lacking camps in connection with NGOs

such as UNHCR, World Food Programme and Refugees International. After meeting people's physical needs, training on hygiene and nutrition can be provided to refugee camp residents. For some refugees, camps may only be temporary places for residence, so government action is required to ensure their appropriate settlement, which is currently too slow in countries facing an influx of refugees. Opening safe routes to safely built, registered refugee camps is another way to ensure that refugees' safety is maintained throughout their journey overseas, which can be announced worldwide through UN organs.

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