

Committee: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

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Topic: Ensuring the Safety of Asylum Seekers



I. INTRODUCTION

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1950. Its mission is to protect lives, uphold human rights, and create a better future for migrants who have been forced to leave their homes or communities. The refugee agency has assisted in numerous crises around the world and was originally created to help people who had lost their homes as a result of World War II. Since then, UNHCR has helped millions of refugees in specific conflicts over the past years in around 137 countries.

The two main roles of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are to provide international protection to refugees and, first and foremost, to ensure the protection and well-being of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people, and other forcibly displaced people. Latter point includes identifying those in need of protection, providing basic assistance such as shelter, food, and medical care, and advocating for their rights and interests. UNHCR seeks durable solutions for refugees, including voluntary repatriation to their country of origin, integration into the local community in their host country, or resettlement in a third country. UNHCR seeks to ensure that refugees can live safe and dignified lives, free from persecution and discrimination.

Currently, there are 4.6 million asylum seekers worldwide and 32.5 million refugees who had previously sought asylum and are now seeking refuge in a country other than their country of origin (UNHCR, 2023). These people seek asylum for a variety of reasons, including armed conflict, discrimination, insecurity, persecution, or other human rights abuses. Ensuring the safety and non-violation of their human rights is the most important refugee right that must be met in all countries seeking asylum.

II. HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

Ancient Times:

1200 BCE: The Israelites flee from Egypt, known as the Exodus.

600 BCE: Persian king Cyrus the Great allows displaced people to return to their homelands.

World War II and Post-War Period:

1933-1945: The Holocaust leads to the forced migration and displacement of millions.

1945: The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) is established to address post-war refugee issues.

1946: The International Refugee Organization (IRO) is created to assist refugees in finding new homes.

Cold War Era:

1948-1949: The Palestinian exodus occurs, displacing Palestinians during the Arab-Israeli conflict.

1951: The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is adopted, defining refugee rights and protections.

1956: Hungarian Revolution leads to a mass exodus of Hungarian refugees seeking asylum in Western countries.

1975: The end of the Vietnam War triggers a wave of refugees, including boat people fleeing Southeast Asia.

Post-Cold War and Modern Era:

1992-1995: The Bosnian War leads to significant displacement and refugee flows in the Balkans.

1994: The Rwandan genocide results in a large number of Rwandan refugees fleeing to neighboring countries.

2001: The September 11 attacks in the United States prompt increased security measures and impact refugee policies globally.

2010 - present: The reports of refugees from Venezuela rise, as the quality of life is affected, several Venezuelans choose to go to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

2011- present: The Syrian Civil War triggers one of the largest refugee crises in recent history, with millions seeking refuge in neighboring countries and Europe.

2015-2016: The European migrant crisis sees a significant influx of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa.

2017: The Rohingya tribe is forced to flee Myanmar due to the genocide carried out by the government.

III. CURRENT HAPPENINGS

Between 2010 and today, reports of refugees from Venezuela are increasing as the quality of life is affected and many Venezuelans choose to leave for countries in Latin America, North America, and the Caribbean. "Dejamos todo en Venezuela. No tenemos un lugar donde vivir o dormir y no tenemos nada para comer" (Nayebis Carolina Figuera, 2023). For several years, people in Venezuela have been practically forced to leave their homes in order to achieve a better quality of life, to live in a country where they feel safe.

Moreover, between 2011 and today, the Syrian civil war triggered one of the largest refugee crises in recent history, with millions of people seeking refuge in neighboring countries and in Europe. On June 2, 2023, there were multiple reports from Dadaab, Kenya, of problems with the influx of Somalis fleeing drought. Somalis seek asylum in Kenya and other countries. On May 30, 2023, the number of asylum seekers in southern Mexico increased.

On July 26, 2023, there was a coup in Niger after a group of soldiers arrested President Mohamed Bazoum at his home in Niamey and declared that they had taken power. Around twenty thousand people were forced to seek refuge after the coup. According to UNHCR staff in Niger, the political crisis has not yet led to a humanitarian crisis, but it is a growing concern: "The risk of becoming victims of early marriages, sexual violence, trafficking and exploitation" According to the statements given, a humanitarian problem could be generated.

IV. KEY POINTS

- **Detention, discrimination and pushbacks to asylum seekers in the borders**

In several countries around the world, countries that receive refugees, there are many cases of discrimination towards refugees, several of these cases involve discriminatory acts, detention or deprivation of liberty of refugees and even that refugees are returned to their country of origin, country where they are no longer safe, where they no longer have a dignified life.

- **Incapacity of receiving countries to provide a dignified life to asylum seekers and the long wait times for asylum claims**

In several countries, there are multiple issues when it comes to sheltering refugees, some of these problems can be the delay or delay in accepting refugees in shelters, that the shelters are in a bad condition or that they are not given a dignified life or a good and stable quality of life.

- **Smuggling and trafficking of asylum seekers**

When people are forced to flee their origin countries they are an easy target for trafficking and smuggling. This is due to some factors that make asylum seekers more vulnerable, these factors are— lack of access to basic resources, lack of a regular status, social and cultural isolation, among others. In addition, fleeing of violence and human rights violations leave asylum seekers vulnerable to falling victim of other human rights violations and serious crimes. As well, that in the search of a dignified life could resort to the services of smugglers.

V. UN ACTIONS

To prevent the expulsion and detention of asylum seekers, UNHCR promotes countries' accession to the Refugee Convention (1951) and the Refugee Protocol (1967). With the aim of providing a dignified posture for asylum seekers in countries with economic difficulties, UNHCR provides and manages its own reception center for refugees in countries that cannot operate their own reception centers.

UNHCR also works to expose and denounce practices of countries that violate international laws and treaties. The organization organizes flights to evacuate and relocate asylum seekers who are in vulnerable situations or who have been smuggled or arbitrarily

detained, and informs asylum seekers with life-saving information so they can move to safe locations to prevent human trafficking. For example, travel options and referrals to the right services. These are just a few examples of actions the refugee agency has taken, but the support of the international community is necessary and crucial to solve this problem.

VI. BLOCK ANALYSIS

Asia and the Pacific Group:

In Asia and the Pacific, there are 9.2 million people of concern to UNHCR, including 4.4 million refugees and asylum seekers, 3.3 million internally displaced persons, and 2.3 million stateless persons.

UNHCR's work in Asia and the Pacific spans two of the world's largest displacement crises, where many girls and boys lack access to quality education, poverty rates are high, statelessness cases are significant, immunization rates against COVID -19 are low, and the threat of gender-based violence is pervasive.

African Group:

Approximately 30 million refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers live in Africa, representing nearly one-third of the world's refugee population. The areas that have hosted refugees and internally displaced persons in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region are characterized by socioeconomic fragility and, in some cases, political volatility.

Despite these challenges, states in the region have not stopped providing asylum. In this context, the case of Uganda is noteworthy, which may still be the African country that has received the most refugees in 2022. Sudan, for its part, has taken in more than one million refugees.

European Group:

According to UNHCR, the total number of affected persons in Europe has decreased by 100,000 between 2019 and 2020. Of the 12 million people of concern to UNHCR in Europe, nearly one-third live in Turkey, a country that has hosted 3.7 million refugees, the highest

number on the continent. The largest number of IDPs in the region remains in Ukraine, home to 734,000 IDPs and 1.6 million conflict-affected people

Latin American Group:

Over a million people, with data from UNHCR until December 2022, have to flee in Central America due multiple factors. Principally by the criminal organizations, extreme and sexual violence and persecution. These people look, as all the asylum seekers, for a safer and better life. Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are the countries with more people fleeing Central America, making a total of 665 000 asylum seekers until December 2022. Continuing with Central America, Nicaragua with 164 000 asylum seekers only from this country. Main destinations of these Central American asylum seekers are: Mexico, United States, Panama and Costa Rica.

In South America there are two very important situations in two different countries. The first in Venezuela, one of the biggest refugee and asylum seekers countries of origin, because of multiple factors, such as: Bad economic conditions, COVID pandemic, violence and criminal organizations, etc. With the data of 2021, around 6 million of refugees globally and 941 000 asylum seekers come from Venezuela. Some of these people needed to cross by smuggling networks putting their lives in danger, and even, not having the rights and work opportunities in the country they looked for asylum. Until countries like: Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru took measures to provide a worthy life and basic rights to asylum seekers and refugees.

The other situation is Colombia, having certain problems with the violence and criminal organizations in the country. The main problem is that the illegal possession of weapons creates the necessity to flee from their homes, mostly all the refugees move in the same country but around 81 000 asylum seekers are from Colombia while 116 000 refugees also are from this country. The most affected groups are the ethical groups forced to flee because of gangs with weapons that put their lives in danger..

North American Group:

Mexico has always been a transit and refuge country for people fleeing violence and persecution in their countries of origin. The Mexican government has shown a willingness to welcome refugees and implement measures to protect and assist them. However, in recent

years, the flow of refugees to Mexico has increased, particularly due to forced migration from countries such as Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. This has made it difficult to manage migration flows and has led the government to seek regional cooperation to comprehensively address the situation.

As for the United States, its position on refugees has changed significantly depending on the administration and policy. Although it has been an important destination for refugees in the past, offering them protection and resettlement opportunities, in recent years there have been restrictions and a more restrictive stance on immigration and asylum policies. The current administration may have more favorable policies toward refugees, but immigration and refugee policies remain controversial and constantly evolving in the United States.

On the other hand, Canada has adopted an open and welcoming attitude toward refugees and has a well-developed immigration and asylum system. The Canadian government has implemented refugee resettlement programs and has actively sought the participation of civil society and local communities in the integration of refugees. Canada is internationally recognized for its humanitarian approach and commitment to refugee rights. However, it also faces challenges in managing migration flows and ensuring equitable distribution of resources for refugee integration across the country.

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