RESEARCH REPORT

COMMITTEE: UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

ISSUE: REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE

CHAIRS: COLINE KOVES, MARIA KHERBOUCHE
The issue to be tackled in the UNHCR committee is the following:

*Addressing migratory issues in MEDCs and improving economic opportunities in countries with high emigration rates.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Today, one in every 122 people in the world is currently either a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum. War, persecution, poverty or even climate change continue to drive people from their home, and sometimes from their country, with the hope of a better future.

Europe saw the number of illegal borders-crossing increasing since the Arab Spring in 2011, when thousands of North African started to arrive on the Italian island of Lampedusa as a result of political instability. In 2015 the U.N. and international nonprofit organizations called the current situation in Europe the “worst refugee crisis since World War II” and the number of refugees is still increasing. Data received from Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain charts a 83 per cent increase in refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean from January to June 2015 – 137,000 compared to 75,000 in the same period last year. Yet Europe is called the “most dangerous destination for irregular migration in the world” by the International Organization for Migration. Indeed, according to the organization, one in every 125 Mediterranean Sea migrants will die attempting to get to Europe. Between January and March 2015, 479 refugees and migrants drowned or went missing.

Despite the escalating human toll, most of the countries’ answer to the refugee crisis has been to secure the borders, neglecting the most basic rights of migrants and refugees, and thus creating division in the EU over how best to deal with resettling people.

One third of the men, women and children who arrived by sea in Italy or Greece were from Syria, whose nationals are almost universally deemed to qualify for refugee status or other forms of protection. The second and third most common countries of origin are Afghanistan and Eritrea, whose nationals are also mostly considered to qualify for refugee status.

"As Europe debates the best way to deal with the rising crisis on the Mediterranean, we must be clear: most of the people arriving by sea in Europe are refugees, seeking protection from war and persecution," António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

**KEY TERMS AND KEY TREATIES**

**REFUGEE:** A refugee is someone who has fled from his country to save their life or preserve their freedom, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for religious,
A refugee has no protection from their own state - it is often their own government that is threatening to persecute him. The status of refugee has been recognized by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

**ASYLUM SEEKERS**: Someone who claims to be a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated. In mid-2014, there were more than 1.2 million asylum-seekers according to the UNHCR.

**MIGRANT**: Refugees and migrants are different status, for migrants (and especially economic migrants) choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. Refugees and migrants are treated very differently under international law.

**RETURNEE**: Someone forced from his home voluntarily deciding to return home. This can be, according to the UNHCR, a solution for refugees if their home is at peace again.

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED**: Someone who remains displaced by conflict within his own homeland: unlike a refugee, an internally displaced person has not crossed a state border and remains under the protection of their own government.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REFUGEE**: Someone forced to leave their home because of natural disasters, such as volcanoes and tsunamis, and who is not protected by international laws. The UNHCR says that 36 million people had been displaced by natural disasters (2009 figures) and scientists predict this number will rise to at least 50 million by 2050.

**THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION**: Grounded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the UNHCR Convention defined the status of refugees, such as their freedom of religion, their right of access to courts, to public education, their duties to the countries in which they find themselves, their right to naturalization...


**SCHENGEN**: Schengen area is an agreement that was signed in 1985 to abolish border controls among the European Nations that have joined. The recent flood of refugees and migrants has overwhelmed those controls in some countries, like Greece. Several member nations have responded by temporarily reimposing internal border controls. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany has warned that Schengen could fall apart if Europe cannot agree on how to manage the migrant crisis.
THE DUBLIN (III) REGULATION, 2013: Stipulates that asylum seekers must remain in the first European country they enter and that country is solely responsible for examining migrants’ asylum applications. Migrants who travel to other EU states face deportation back to the EU country they originally entered, a process known as Dublin transfers.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJE4iGMVvmk

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- **1948-now**: Palestinian Crisis (4.8m refugees under UNHCR jurisdiction today).
- **1950**: Creation of UNHCR by the UN General Assembly.
- **1951**: Convention related to the Status of Refugees.
- **1985**: Creation of the Schengen Area.
- **2011**: Arab Spring. Six governments overthrown (Egypt twice and Yemen twice)
  - Three civil wars (Syria, Iraq, Libya). c 350,000 deaths, 80% in Syria.
- **2013**: Dublin III Regulation.
- **2014**: - Syria becomes the main country for refugee applications in the EU.
  - UNHCR estimates at 59.5 million the numbers of forcibly displaced worldwide, the highest rate since the WW2.

MAJOR COUNTRIES INVOLVED

1. WHERE ARE THE REFUGEES COMING FROM?
A. SYRIA

Today, nearly 12 millions Syrians (more than half of the population!) have been forced from their home since the beginning of the crisis. According to the UN Refugee Agency, 51% of the refugees attempting to reach Europe are Syrian.

In Syria, the population faces several dangers: the government, the rebels fighting against the government and the Islamic State forces (ISIS). Most of the Syrian refugees have fled to neighbouring countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, and most have ended up in camps. According to the UNHCR, less than 10% of Syrians who have fled the conflict have sought safety in Europe.

B. ERITREA

Around 5,000 Eritreans flee from their country each month. Eritrea is one of the harshest totalitarian regimes: the population is kept permanently under surveillance, arbitrarily arrested and tortured. Thus, more than 5% of the populations have left.

Eritrean refugees take shelter in geographically close states, eg Ethiopia (hosting 120 000 Eritreans), but many are leaving Africa for the Middle-East or Europe.
C. AFGHANISTAN

Since 2001, Taliban forces and now the ISIS are making 80% of the country unsafe. As a result, the Afghans are currently the second-largest population fleeing their country (and has held the first position for three decades) and 15% of the world’s refugees.

95% of Afghans refugees are hosted by Pakistan and Iran. According to EASO (European Asylum support office), 50,000 Afghans sought political asylum in 2015 and the total ought to be even higher for 2015.

Naturally, refugees also come from other countries such as Libya, Sudan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kosovo, Iraq, Iran, Darfur, Somalia and so on. Common factors are the unstable political, financial and social situation that leads refugees to flee the country. In order to assure that refugees are out or danger and can return, the economy of a country needs to be stable. That is why improving economic opportunities in countries with high emigration rates is critical.

2. THE MAJOR REFUGEE-HOSTING COUNTRIES/AREAS?

It is often the neighbouring countries that have to face the main flow of refugees.

**Turkey** : According to UNHCR, it became the top host country in 2014 with almost 1.9 million refugees due to proximity to Eastern Africa and Middle-East, the refugees do not have to endure a long and risky journey. Secondly, Europe remains a ‘paradise’, and Turkey is thus the major point of departure for refugees trying to cross into Greece or those who make their way through Western Balkans.
**Lebanon**: Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees (1.3 millions) as a proportion of its national population, almost one out of three Lebanese inhabitant is a refugee.

**Pakistan and Iran**: Pakistan (1.5 million refugees almost all Afghans) and Iran (900.000 although 500.000 Afghans returned in 2014) border on Afghanistan, birthplace of the second-largest flight of a community. These host countries are being stretched to their limits by the influx, host countries and the refugees themselves suffer from the situation.

**Europe**: The main points of entry to the EU for migrants are also the countries the most hit by the economic crisis: Spain, Greece, Italy. In Eastern Europe, Hungary is also an important entry point for Syrians, Afghans but also citizens from Kosovo traveling through Macedonia and Serbia.

According to the Dublin Regulation, refugees have to claim asylum in the first EU member state in which they arrive. Yet this system has started to break down: Greece and Hungary have been swamped with new arrivals. Dublin transfers back to Greece and Hungary had been stopped since 2011. Germany decided in August to suspend the Dublin rules for Syrians who manage to reach its soil, and to process them itself. European leaders have been arguing over how to modify the regulation and distribute the migration burden more evenly across Europe, but several countries, especially in Eastern Europe, have resisted proposals for mandatory quotas.

**Germany** is currently the preferred destination for tens of thousands of migrants in central Europe. More than 800,000 people are expected to claim asylum there this year, more than what the entire EU took in 2014. Hundreds of thousands of people are somewhere along the route to Germany, in Hungary, Croatia, Austria, Serbia, and elsewhere.

Italy, Sweden the United Kingdom and France are also receiving a lot of applications.

For further information, see [https://youtu.be/RvOnXh3NN9w](https://youtu.be/RvOnXh3NN9w)
PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

NEGATIVE IMPACT:
- Refugees compete with the local citizens for scarce resources such as land, water, housing, food and medical services.
- Their presence leads to more important demands on natural resources, education and health facilities, social services and employment which may cause growing pressures on prices and depress wages.
- Different ethnicity can be a basis for problems. Traditional animosities may exist between groups, failures in communication and understanding caused by language and/or culture can form serious barriers.

POSITIVE IMPACT:
- An economic stimulus may be generated by the presence of refugees and can lead to the opening and development of the host regions.
- The presence of refugees also contributes to the creation of employment benefiting the local population, directly or indirectly.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:
When tension does occur and asylum has been generously extended by a host country, it is the responsibility of the international community and the UNHCR to mitigate the negative impact and to redress damage caused. Host governments expect, that the international community will help compensate for the costs incurred in providing asylum for the refugees.

France has pledged to accept just 24,000 and the UK 20,000 over five years. The US has agreed to accept 10,000 refugees, Australia 12,000. Things are going better, but not fast enough. A possible solution would be to oblige the countries to accept a certain amount of refugees in proportion to their GDP. For those who don’t agree, they could offer in compensation an important financial help to the countries like Lebanon, Turkey or Hungary in order to help them cope with the crisis. The financial help could also be provided to NGOs who are, every day, help the refugees during their journeys.

The risky journey and the high death rate stay very alarming but at least some alternatives are found by the refugees. Social media and the internet have become a vital part of being a refugee, GPS is used to navigate through Europe, Facebook groups give tips and information about obstacles and controls in real time.
Interesting Websites:

About the refugee crisis in Europe:
http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home
http://unhcr.org/556725e69.htm
https://www.hrw.org
http://www.cfr.org/migration/europes-migration-crisis/p32874

About the situation in Syria:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5H5w3_OTG0

About the situation in Eritrea:

About the situation in Afghanistan:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmQpY6GBhxE
http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html

Countries involved: France, Germany, Syria, Greece, Hungary, USA, Russia, Turkey, Lebanon, UK, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, Bulgaria, Saudia Arabia, China, Australia, Nigeria, Italy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5H5w3_OTG0
http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home
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