

Forum: Political Committee

Issue: Preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies

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Introduction

Around 20 people are forced to leave their homes every minute due to conflict, persecution, or war. Of the approximately 68.5 million people in the world who have been forcibly displaced, 25.4 million are refugees. In addition to the many dangers and challenges refugees face, there is also increasing prejudice and hostility towards refugees and migrants, which can have serious negative effects on their social welfare and healthcare benefits as they try to establish themselves in new communities.

One important action that can be taken is to create a more informed and accurate public discussion about migrants and refugees. Progressive political groups that support an inclusive approach to migrants and refugees have had difficulty combating extremist views and mistrust among host communities. While anti-racism and prejudice reduction efforts, such as TV campaigns and public service announcements on radio and billboards, have been implemented in many countries, it is not clear how effective they have been.

It is, however, evident that public attitudes towards migration vary significantly, with Europe being a prime example. Research by Valeria Bello shows that transnational factors such as the "war on terror" have led to an increase in far-right extremism, prejudiced attitudes towards migrants, and xenophobia around the world.

In 2016, during the European migrant and refugee crisis, a survey found that Eastern and Central European countries were less welcoming to migrants than Western European countries. Hungary was the least accepting of migrants, while Sweden was the most accepting. Another survey of 18,000 voters in 15 European countries asked participants to evaluate 180,000 profiles of asylum seekers that differed randomly on nine characteristics that might affect public support, such as education and skills levels, religion, and reasons for seeking asylum.

Asylum seekers who were more likely to be able to work, had strong and consistent reasons for seeking asylum, and were particularly vulnerable received the most public support. Additionally, Christian asylum seekers were more likely to be seen as deserving of support than Muslim asylum seekers. Essentially,

asylum seekers were seen as more worthy of support if they had the potential to contribute economically and had humanitarian reasons for seeking entry. While these perceptions may be biased, they are the reality that fact-based anti-discrimination efforts must address and work to change.

Furthermore, Recent research showing anti-Muslim bias in US government agencies highlights the need for interventions to focus on prejudices held by public sector workers and policymakers, as these attitudes can lead to discriminatory treatment. This research serves as a warning that such biases must be addressed.

The perceived "moral deservingness" of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants influences how they are treated and the policies that are implemented toward them. "Moral deservingness" refers to perceptions that are separate from the formal rights and policies that are based in law. These perceptions often affect the way that entitlements, such as healthcare, are actually granted in practice. For example, even when refugees have a legal right to healthcare, it may be denied by healthcare workers if they do not believe the refugees are morally deserving of care.

Discrimination based on race or ethnicity can have serious health consequences for mobile populations. Racism and discrimination can lead to higher rates of mental health disorders and physical health problems. When discrimination is institutional or structural, refugees and migrants may have reduced access to public services and healthcare entitlements due to their race or ethnicity. For example, social segregation in housing policies may concentrate migrants in areas that are far from good schools, hospitals, and public transportation, and as a result, they may experience discrimination. In these cases, discrimination is not the result of an individual's actions, but rather an unjust system of laws and policies that perpetuate inequality over time.

Other research has found that EU officials often base their perceptions of deservingness on medical evidence of trauma and violence, such as physical wounds or mental health issues. There has been an increase in the use of medical certificates in asylum claims, which seems to be replacing asylum seekers' own accounts when determining whether to grant refugee status, suggesting that there may be a lack of trust in the testimony of asylum seekers.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugees: A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence. They have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. They are outside of their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return because of this fear. They are also entitled to protection under international law and the rights granted by the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Discrimination: Discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on certain grounds that has the effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. Discrimination can take many forms and can be directed at individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and other grounds.

Racism: Racism is widely recognized as discrimination, prejudice, or antagonism directed at people based on their perceived membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically characterized by the belief that certain races are superior to others. It can take the form of individual acts of discrimination, as well as structural or systemic discrimination that is built into the laws, policies, and practices of societies.

Xenophobia: Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of foreigners, people from different cultures, or strangers. It can manifest as prejudice, discrimination, hostility, or violence directed at individuals or groups perceived as being foreign.

Migration: Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another, whether within their own country or across international borders. The United Nations uses the term "migrant" to refer to all people on the move, regardless of the reasons for their migration.

Asylum Seekers: An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. *It is crucial to recognize the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker.

Stateless: A stateless person is someone who is not considered a national by any state under the operation of its law. Stateless individuals are not able to enjoy the protection and rights that are afforded to citizens of a country, and they often face a wide range of legal and practical difficulties as a result.

Standard of living: Standard of living is the level of wealth, comfort, material goods, and necessities available to a certain socioeconomic class or geographic area. It's also generally considered to be the level of health, education, and access to services in a society. Standard of living is often used as an indicator of a person's or a society's well-being, it is not just a measure of income but it takes into account the availability of goods and services, the access to education, healthcare, housing, and transportation and many other factors that impact the quality of life.

General Overview

The refugee crisis is a significant problem that requires international attention. In the past, countries such as

those in the European Union have attempted to discourage refugees from risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean by tightening their borders. However, this has proven ineffective as refugees continue to arrive in large numbers. Without cooperation from all member states, many more people fleeing conflict will have nowhere to call home.

Existing refugee camps, such as those in Greece, are overwhelmed and cannot provide adequate resources such as food and water for the influx of refugees. Additionally, the limited number of refugee camps often leads to overcrowding and conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups. This was evident in the Moria camp in Greece, where violent clashes between Shia, Sunni, Muslim, Kurds, Arabs, and Afghans were reported.

Racism and discrimination also exist in these camps, making women and children particularly vulnerable to physical and psychological harm. Children as young as ten have attempted suicide in the camps, which is a clear indication of the intense emotional stress that refugees endure globally. Charitable organizations, as a result, have withdrawn support from refugee camps.

At ECOSOC, humanitarian coordination is a key issue, and delegates should be reminded of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that are planned to be achieved by 2030. Among the SDGs, the global refugee crisis relates directly to goals 2, 3, and 6, and may also connect to others. The importance of addressing this issue cannot be understated, and it is crucial for delegates to work together to develop long-term solutions that improve the overall well-being of refugees, provide sustainable and efficient protection and shelter, and ultimately contribute to achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

European Union

The European Union (EU) has a common asylum policy and is responsible for coordinating the response of its member states to the refugee crisis. One of the main criticisms of the EU's approach to the refugee crisis is its emphasis on external border control and restriction of movement, rather than providing aid and support to refugees. The EU has invested heavily in border control measures, such as building walls and fences, deploying border guards, and funding and training the coast guards of countries such as Turkey and Libya to prevent refugees from crossing into Europe. This has led to the deaths of thousands of refugees and migrants while trying to cross the Mediterranean sea and also created a bottleneck of refugees in countries such as Greece, and Italy where they are facing inhumane conditions. Additionally, the EU has been criticized for not preventing discrimination in the provision of aid and access to asylum, particularly against certain groups of refugees such as those from Africa, who have been disproportionately affected by the

crisis. The EU has made some efforts to address these issues, such as creating a relocation program to distribute refugees among its member states and providing funding and support to countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, which are hosting large numbers of refugees. But overall the EU's approach has been criticized for being inadequate and not addressing the root causes of the refugee crisis.

United States

The US is one of the largest donors of aid to refugees and has historically been a leading destination for asylum seekers. However, the current administration has implemented a number of policies that have restricted the ability of refugees to enter the country and has been criticized for discriminatory policies towards certain groups of refugees, such as those from Muslim-majority countries. The "Travel Ban" implemented by the current administration targeted several Muslim-majority countries, which was seen as discriminatory, and the "Remain in Mexico" policy which forced asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their US asylum cases to be processed, has been criticized for putting refugees in dangerous situations.

Canada

The country has a reputation for its welcoming attitude towards refugees and migrants and is one of the few countries in the world that has a private sponsorship program, which allows individuals and groups to sponsor refugees to come to Canada. However, the country has faced criticisms for its treatment of asylum seekers crossing the border irregularly. The Canadian government has been criticized for the slow processing of asylum claims and for the inadequate support provided to asylum seekers during the process.

Germany

The country has been a leader in accepting refugees and migrants in Europe, with more than one million people seeking asylum in the country since 2015. However, the country has faced challenges integrating the new arrivals and addressing the needs of the large numbers of refugees and migrants. Germany has been praised for its open-door policy towards refugees, but it has also been criticized for not providing adequate support for integration and for not preventing discrimination against refugees.

Turkey

Turkey has hosted a large number of Syrian refugees. As of 2022, Turkey hosts over 4 million Syrian refugees, which is the largest number of refugees hosted by any country in the world. The Turkish government has stated that it is committed to providing aid and support to refugees, and has implemented policies aimed at preventing discrimination against refugees, such as providing access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. However, there have been reports of discrimination against

Syrian refugees in Turkey, particularly in terms of access to housing and employment. The government has also been criticized for not providing enough support to refugees living outside of official camps. Turkey's stance is that it has been shouldering a big refugee burden and the international community should do more to help.

Lebanon

Since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, Lebanon has taken in over 1.5 million Syrian refugees, which is equivalent to around 25% of its entire population. Despite the significant burden this has placed on the country, the Lebanese government has not officially recognized the presence of Syrian refugees and has not provided them with legal protection or access to basic services such as education and healthcare. This lack of recognition has led to widespread discrimination against Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Many refugees are living in extreme poverty and are not able to access basic services or work legally. Lebanese stance is that they are facing a very difficult economic situation and the burden of the refugee crisis has made the situation worse. They are calling for more support from the international community and for more refugees to be resettled in other countries.

Australia

The country has a policy of offshore processing of asylum seekers, meaning that people who arrive in the country by boat are sent to detention centers on islands in the Pacific, and have been criticized for the inhumane conditions on those centers, and for not providing enough aid and support to refugees. The Australian government has been criticized for the poor conditions in the offshore detention centers and for the lack of support provided to refugees.

Bangladesh

The country has been a host to more than one million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar and has been criticized for not providing enough aid and support to refugees, and for not doing enough to prevent discrimination in the provision of aid and access to asylum. The Bangladeshi government has been criticized for not providing enough support to refugees, and for not providing enough access to education and employment opportunities.

Timeline of Treaties and Events

23 April 2015	The European Council held a meeting to address the need for increased presence in the Mediterranean to not only conduct
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	search and rescue operations but also combat illegal migration and human trafficking into Europe.
3 February 2016	28 EU Member States reached an agreement to provide Turkey with €3 billion to support the establishment of refugee facilities in Turkey. The funds will primarily be used to address the urgent needs of refugees, such as food, healthcare, and housing.
1 August 2018	The recently enacted law on migrant family reunification expands the rights of refugees in Germany who have been granted "subsidiary" protection, meaning they are not yet eligible for full asylum, to reunite with their families. This will allow them to stay in Germany for a longer period of time.
5 January 2019	The number of migrants arriving in the European Union is the lowest it has been since 2015. Approximately 150,000 refugees have traveled through the Mediterranean.
23 September 2020	The European Commission released a new plan called the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which seeks to improve cooperation with the countries of origin and transit for refugees, in order to return those who are not eligible to stay in Europe.

UN Involvement

The United Nations has been involved in preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies for several years. There are several UN organizations that work towards this goal, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The UNHCR is responsible for providing protection, assistance, and solutions to refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons worldwide. The organization works with governments, NGOs, and other partners to ensure that refugees are treated fairly and without discrimination. UNHCR's mandate is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees and to ensure that they are not returned to places where they would face persecution, torture, or other forms of serious harm. They also include guidelines on the treatment of LGBTQ asylum seekers and guidance on ensuring that women refugees have access to protection and

assistance that is responsive to their specific needs.

The OHCHR is another UN organization that is involved in preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies. The organization works to promote and protect human rights around the world. The OHCHR provides support and advice to governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders on how to implement human rights standards and principles, including those related to refugees and asylum seekers. The OHCHR also monitors and investigates human rights violations and advocates for accountability for those responsible.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) works to improve the living conditions of refugees and promote their integration into host communities. UN-Habitat works with local governments and communities to provide shelter, infrastructure, and basic services to refugees and migrants. UN-Habitat also promotes the integration of refugees into host communities through initiatives that foster social cohesion and promote economic opportunities.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides assistance and protection to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. UNRWA provides basic services such as healthcare, education, and shelter to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the occupied Palestinian territory. UNRWA also works to promote the rights of Palestinian refugees and advocate for their protection.

The UN General Assembly adopted the Global Compact on Refugees. The Compact aims to improve the response to refugee situations by ensuring that refugees are included in national systems and are given the opportunity to become self-reliant. The Compact also calls on governments to provide more support to countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

Relevant UN Documents

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951, 189/UNTS/137)

Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1967, 605/UNTS/267)

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2)

Global Compact on Refugees (2018, A/RES/73/12)

Resolution on the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Africa (2004, AHG/Res.63 (XXXIX))

Resolution on the Protection of Migrants and their Families (2000, A/RES/55/93)

Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who are not Nationals of the Country in which They Live (1985 A/RES/40/144)

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights of migrants (2015, A/HRC/29/32)

Resolution on the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants (2018, A/RES/73/145)

Joint General Assembly and ECOSOC Declaration on the Essential Principles of Humanitarian Assistance (1991, A/RES/46/182)

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies have been a persistent issue that has been addressed by various organizations and government bodies. One of the major efforts to combat discrimination in these policies has been through the implementation of laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, religion, nationality, and other protected characteristics.

The aforementioned United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been at the forefront of efforts to address discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies. The organization has developed guidelines and standards for protecting refugees, including provisions to prevent discrimination. These guidelines include the "Handbook on the Protection of Refugee Women" which addresses gender-based violence and discrimination and the "Guidance Note on the Protection of Children in the Context of International Migration" which emphasizes the rights and protection of child refugees. They also provide training and support to government officials and organizations working with refugees to ensure that these guidelines and standards are being implemented.

The European Union has also made efforts to combat discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies. The EU has adopted several legal instruments, such as the Qualification Directive and the Asylum Procedures Directive, which include provisions to prevent discrimination. The Qualification Directive for instance, sets out the criteria for determining whether a person is a refugee or a beneficiary of subsidiary protection, and the Asylum Procedures Directive sets out the rights and obligations of asylum seekers and the procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection. Additionally, the EU has established the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which provides support to EU Member States in the field of asylum, including by providing guidance on how to prevent discrimination in asylum procedures.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) also plays a role in preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies. The IOM works with governments and other organizations to develop and

implement policies and programs that promote the rights and well-being of refugees, including provisions to prevent discrimination. For instance, IOM has developed the "Migrant Protection and Reintegration Standards" that provides guidance on how to ensure the protection of migrants, including refugees, from discrimination and abuse.

However, despite these efforts, discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies continues to be a problem. The reasons for this are complex and multifaceted, but one key issue is the lack of consistent implementation and enforcement of existing laws and regulations. Another issue is the lack of understanding and awareness of the impact of discrimination on refugees and their communities, which leads to a lack of political will to address the problem.

Overall, preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies is a complex and ongoing challenge. While progress has been made through laws, regulations, and guidelines, more needs to be done to ensure that these measures are effectively implemented and enforced, and that there is a deeper understanding of the impact of discrimination on refugees and their communities. This can be achieved by continued collaboration between governments, international organizations, and civil society, as well as by investing in research and education to better understand the root causes of discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening legal frameworks: One of the most important steps in preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies is to ensure that laws and regulations are in place that prohibit discrimination. This includes laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, religion, nationality, and other protected characteristics. Additionally, these laws should be enforced and penalties for discrimination should be enforced.

Increasing awareness and understanding: Another important step in preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies is to increase awareness and understanding of the impact of discrimination on refugees and their communities. This includes educating government officials, organizations working with refugees, and the public about the negative effects of discrimination and the importance of treating all refugees with dignity and respect.

Enhancing collaboration and coordination: Collaboration and coordination between governments, international organizations, and civil society is crucial in preventing discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies. This includes working together to develop and implement policies and programs that promote the rights and well-being of refugees and to share best practices and lessons learned.

Improving data collection and monitoring: To effectively prevent discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies, it is important to have accurate and reliable data on the experiences of refugees. This includes collecting data on the prevalence of discrimination, the groups of refugees who are most affected, and the types of discrimination that are most prevalent. This data can then be used to inform policies and programs to address discrimination.

Investing in research and education: Investing in research and education is crucial to understanding the root causes of discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies. This includes conducting research to better understand the factors that contribute to discrimination, as well as investing in education to raise awareness and understanding of the issue.

Emphasizing on community-based approach: A community-based approach could be taken to address discrimination in refugee aid and asylum policies, this includes engaging with local communities and organizations, and involving refugees in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies and programs. This could help to ensure that policies and programs are responsive to the needs of refugees and that they are more likely to be accepted and supported by local communities.

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