

Forum: Advisory Panel Question (APQ) on Refugees

Issue: Countering Toxic Narratives About Refugees and Migrants

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Introduction

37,000 refugees a day are forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution, and there are currently 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Most of them suffer intolerable conditions in refugee camps, with an average stay of 17 years. Those that make it to host nations have left their whole lives behind to start anew. However, their plight has gone unnoticed by society; when they enter a new country towards better futures, nationalist and xenophobic sentiments paint it as “an influx of criminals and job-stealers.”

These anti-immigrant, anti-Islamic toxic narratives propagandized by populists has led to hate crimes, lack of essential services and humanitarian assistance, fear, racial and workplace discrimination, discriminatory policies, and stereotypes. These narratives prominently emerged after the September 11 attacks and European Migrant Crisis because populist leaders campaign on prioritizing the nation's people and protecting their national identity; thus, any Western nations are implementing laws to limit the migrant flow and indirectly creating large-scale humanitarian disasters.

Definition of Key Terms

Toxic Narratives

Toxic narratives are “intentionally based on false or misleading information” and perpetuate stereotypes, toxic perceptions, and generalizations about a particular group of people, resulting in security challenges and fewer opportunities for success for

refugees. Culturally responsive teachings and negative media portrayals may have contributed to these narratives.

Refugees

Refugees are people forced to flee their countries due to violence or persecution for race, religion, nationality, political opinion, etc. They can't return to their homes or are afraid to due to infernal wars or poverty. $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world's refugees are from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Somalia.

Migrants

The term "migrant" cannot be used interchangeably with the term "refugee" because "migrant status" is not defined under international law. Migrants usually refer to people who move by choice instead of indirect coercion, but they may include those who crossed borders to join family members, search for better opportunities, etc.

Hate crimes

A hate crime typically involves violence and is motivated by prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of a certain group of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Disinformation

Disinformation is false information spread intentionally to mislead, usually associated with politics and propaganda.

Nationalism

Nationalism is the idea of being loyal and devoted to a nation. Nationalists would place primary emphasis on promoting its own culture and interests, but extreme nationalism includes being violent towards minorities and turning away those who are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

Xenophobia

Xenophobia is the fear and hatred of foreigners. Populist political parties build their support by scapegoating immigrants for the nation's problems and creating fear in the hearts of citizens.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is the fear, hatred of, or prejudice against the Islamic religion or Muslims because they are seen as the source of terrorism. Islamophobia is utilized by politicians and their campaigns to "fight against a common enemy" like Donald Trump in the United States of America (USA), Boris Johnson in the United Kingdom (UK), and many emerging neo-Nazi parties in Europe.

Human rights

Human rights are rights every person has "regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more."

Background Information

Rise of populism/ xenophobia

Populism usually arises when citizens are dissatisfied with their country's economic conditions and migrant policies. Populist parties gain support through promising to decrease the number of immigrants entering the country and providing fewer benefits to these incomers. The parties target the people's perceived loss of national identity because of immigrants and asylum seekers.

2001 September 11 attacks

Islamophobia increased after the 2001 September 11 attacks. People view Islam as violent, threatening, and supportive of terrorism. Right-wing populism sentiments

fueled fear and hatred towards Muslims across the United States of America (USA), Europe, Asian-Pacific countries, including removing women's hijabs, conducting random assaults, and refusing to take in refugees through immigration and travel bans. Immigration detention centers and refusal to take refugees further infringe human rights, showing how Islamophobia has further worsened the refugee crisis.

2008 Great Recession

With the economy worldwide stagnating due to the United States subprime mortgage crisis, the influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants from the Middle East and Africa have stirred nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments. As a result, right-wing populist parties achieved significant electoral victories, blaming taking refugees as a contributor to the economy's failure.

European Migrant Crisis

The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East have led millions to flee for Europe mainly during the European Migrant Crisis, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea to escape the brutal civil war fought between the Assad Regime and US-backed rebels. Due to the massive influx of Muslim refugees and migrants, migration raised many questions about European identity and increased the popularity of right-wing leaders that promoted xenophobic and authoritarian policies that challenge the European Union (EU)'s system of diversity and inclusion.

Involvement of social media in spreading hate speech

In March 2018, the United Nations (UN)'s Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar announced that social media has "substantively contributed to the level of acrimony." Reuters also uncovered thousands of Facebook (FB) posts like pornographic images attacking the Rohingya. There were many Facebook (FB) posts inciting violence and hatred against the Rohingya. Two Ph.D. students at Warwick University found that areas with rises in anti-migrant posts lead to 50% more anti-refugee violent crimes than the national average during 2015-2017.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Alternative for Deutschland (AFD)

The right-wing Alternative for Deutschland (AFD) rose due to actively opposing German Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming policy towards refugees from the Middle East, taking approximately 1.5 million migrants since 2015. This party holds anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim beliefs and seeks to change Germany's constitution to get immediately deport all rejected applications no matter whether the deportees' countries are safe or not. To further restrict the inflow of migrants, the Alternative for Deutschland (AFD) aims to implement strict identity checks along Germany's borders and set up holding camps abroad to prevent migrants from entering Germany. Supporters and politicians of the Alternative for Deutschland (AFD) argue that Germany is being "Islamized" and that its Christian identity is being invaded.

European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) an economic and political block that consists of 28 countries. People elect Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to represent various political parties of the European Union (EU) member countries. To stop discrimination and promote the rights of refugees, the European Union (EU) has put forth The Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals, supported immigrant support services, monitor policy developments of minorities, provided funding through European Social Fund (ESF) and other programs. Although many Eurosceptic leaders and populists are being elected into the European Union (EU), the European Union (EU) continues to pass policies and programs against toxic narratives against refugees.

France

After the November 2015 Paris attacks, political journalist Éric Zemmour and the National Rally Party (RN) led by Le Pen blamed all of these problems on French Muslim communities, so the public often associated immigration with national security. Immigrant communities are marginalized and live in their own ghettos with high violence, drugs, and unemployment rates. The state neglects these communities and don't provide them with police and medical assistance. However, the French parliament pushed to change the negative public perception towards refugees by implementing a law to fight online hate speech. Social media

networks need to remove hate content within 24 hours and create a new button so users can flag abuse, and sites that fail to do so may be fined up to €1.25m.

Hungary's Fidesz-KDNP Party Alliance

From 2010-2014, Fidesz-KDNP eliminated the checks and balances of the Hungarian government through implementing a political system that maintained their political control and controlling public broadcasting and independent media outlets. Fidesz-KDNP's campaign finances and business dealings lacked transparency and contributed to systemic corruption. In 2018, Fidesz-KDNP tightened the regulations for public demonstrations. This party alliance portrayed Muslims extremely negatively and spread hateful rhetoric, conspiracy theories, and disinformation. Even though Muslims make up only 0.057% of Hungary's population as of 2011, Hungarians view Muslims with negativity than any other European Union (EU) nation.

International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)

The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) is an international non-profit, human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Japan to eliminate discrimination and racism and promote human rights. IMADR has a United Nations (UN) liaison office in Geneva and consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its rare emphasis was on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the only legally binding address to racial discrimination. The IMADR develops grassroots movements with minorities and organizations around the world and also participates in local, regional, and international events and joint investigations. As one of the few international human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) based outside the North Atlantic region, IMADR is very important for indigenous communities. The IMADR has worked with indigenous communities in Argentina, Sri Lanka, and India.

Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S)

Founded by comedian Beppe Grillo and entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, the Five Star Movement (M5S) appeals mainly to the young, unemployed, and those living in the South of Italy as "an alternative to the establishment." The party pushes for anti-austerity economics, xenophobic sentiment, anti-globalization, Euroscepticism, and anti-immigration. Much of the party's success was due to substantial national debt from the 2008 financial crisis. In the 2018

Italian general election, the Five Star Movement (M5S) became the biggest party in Italy and formed a coalition with the anti-immigration Lega Nord (LN) party to gain the majority in the European Parliament (EP).

Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) Party

The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), led by Jarosław Kaczyński, won majority power in 2015 and greatly challenged the European Union (EU). Citizens voted based on promises of earlier social welfare and defense of Polish and Christian national identities. This party got rid of civil services, pressed fines on a free press, had divisive courts, and vetoed a European Union (EU) anti-LGBTIQ discrimination bill. The European Commission (EC) saw the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) as a threat to liberal democratic values when it tried to torpedo the re-election of Donald Tusk as president of the European Council (EUCO) in 2017. Also, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) dealt with cases when the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) attempted to assert direct control over the Polish judiciary.

The Netherlands's Party for Freedom (PVV)

A right-wing, anti-Islam, nationalist party with Geert Wilders as its sole member currently, the Party for Freedom (PVV) was controversial since, in December 2012, European Commission (EC) condemned its website *Reporting Centre on Central and East Europeans*, which purpose was to receive complaints about Central and East European immigrants in the Netherlands. It had headlines like "Wouldn't it be better if you went back home?" and "East Europeans, increasingly criminal." The party also proposed banning the Quran and shutting down all mosques in the Netherlands, spreading the message that immigrants should adapt to the dominant Judeo-Christian culture.

United Kingdom (UK)

Since Brexit (withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union), toxic narratives towards refugees and migrants increased in the United Kingdom (UK). The Ipsos MORI global data from 2016 found that over half of respondents believed that "most foreigners who want to get into my country as a refugee really aren't refugees (and) just want to come here for economic reasons, or to take advantage of our welfare services." According to the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, evidence in recent years shows that "levels of opposition to immigration in the UK are moderately high." In the 2019 United Kingdom general

election, Boris Johnson campaigned on permitting only skilled workers in certain needed economic areas to immigrate and stopping European Union (EU) immigrants from treating the United Kingdom (UK) “as their own.” He faced severe criticism for creating a “more hostile and closed society,” and many pointed out that unemployed people did find jobs later and significantly benefited the NHS (National Health Service) and many industries.

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations (UN) spoke out against hate speech and made it part of their agenda to prevent it in every situation since preventing hate speech could prevent armed conflict, crimes, terrorism, racism and discrimination towards minorities, and violation of human rights. The United Nations (UN) believes in democratic values, social stability, and peace. In response, the United Nations (UN) launched The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. The objective of the plan is to address the root causes of hate speech and initiate effective responses.

United States of America (USA)

In 2016, President Trump spread populist rhetoric especially towards white men through campaigning on deporting all illegal immigrants, “building the wall,” demeaning Mexicans as “criminals, drug dealers, rapists,” and implementing a “Muslim ban.” The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) launched raids across the country targeting immigrants, and more than 50,000 immigrants were held in detention centers. Also, the Trump administration reduced the cap on refugees to only 18,000. Trump’s discriminatory Executive Order 13769 barred Syrian refugees from entering the United States (US) indefinitely, suspended all refugee admissions for 120 days, and blocked citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States (US) for at least 90 days. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data show that since Trump’s election, there were enormous increases in hate crimes in counties where Trump won by larger margins, the highest increase after September 11, 2001.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
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1951	<p>1951 Refugee Convention (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees)</p> <p>Signed by 145 countries on July 28, 1951 and put into effect on April 22, 1954, this convention defines the “refugee,” outlines the rights of the displaced and legal obligations of States to protect them, and affirms its core principle of non-refoulement.</p>
September 11, 2001	<p>2001 September 11 attacks</p> <p>In the 2001 September 11 attacks, al-Qaeda hijacked and crashed four commercial airplanes, destroying the World Trade Center and one side of the Pentagon, killing 2996 people, and wounding 6000. It shaped the United States’s (US) foreign policy of the 21st century to combat terrorism and increased Islamophobia and right-wing populism.</p>
December 2007- June 2009	<p>2008 Great Recession</p> <p>Due to the Great Recession, every European country had to raise taxes and cut benefit payments. Rising unemployment and plummeting purchasing power resulted. Far-right parties gained massive support since they blamed the over-acceptance of refugees for contributing to the financial crisis.</p>
21:16, 13 November 2015- 00:58, 14 November 2015	<p>November 2015 Paris attacks</p> <p>The attack included mass shootings, suicide bombing, and hostage-taking, killing 138 and 413 victims. In response, the French government issued a three-month state of emergency, and the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to make it harder for Syrian and Iraqi refugees to enter the US. In the 2015 french regional elections, Marine Le Pen, President of the National Rally (RN) party, gained massive support through pushing for hardline security measures and anti-immigrant policies.</p>
2015-	<p>Myanmar Refugee Crisis</p> <p>The Rohingya are Muslims living in the Buddhist majority Myanmar, and they were systematically persecuted by the military, causing a refugee crisis of most people displaced since World War II (WWII). Hundreds of villages were burned to the ground, families were slaughtered, and women were raped. Many</p>

escaped to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, currently the world's largest refugee camp. The majority of Myanmar's population refuse to recognize the Rohingya as citizens and believe that they benefited from British colonization and World War II (WWII); however, the Rohingya have lived in Myanmar as early as the 8th century. These stereotypes were spread by laws legitimizing discrimination. On January 24, 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Myanmar to stop the genocide.

January 27, 2017 United States (US) President Trump signed Executive Order 13769 (Muslim Ban)

Executive Order 13769 (Muslim Ban) lowered the number of refugees to the US, suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for 120 days and entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely, detained more than 700 travelers, and provisionally revoked more than 60,000 visas. The signing sparked much controversy with many protests, and the federal court ruled against Trump because the bill discriminated against Muslims. The federal court stated that "No person shall receive any preference or priority or be discriminated against in the issuance of an immigrant visa because of the person's race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence."

September 5, 2017 Rescission of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Issued by President Obama in 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protects 800,000 young undocumented immigrants- DREAMERS- from deportation. On September 5, 2017, former Attorney General Sessions announced that the Trump administration would end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and 800,000 will be eligible for deportation and lose education and work visas. Lawsuits were filed against the rescission of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) with two federal appellate courts ordered the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to continue renewing work permits for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) holders. The case was brought to the Supreme Court.

March 17, 2018-
July 2019

Facebook–Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal

The scandal sparked when whistleblower Christopher Wylie revealed that Cambridge Analytica had harvested the 87 million Facebook (FB)'s users' personal data without consent for political advertising. It was also revealed that politicians paid Cambridge Analytica to intentionally sway voters. However, Mark Zuckerberg had to testify in front of the US Congress, but Facebook said it wouldn't ban political ads even though it may contain hate speech. In July 2019, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) fined Facebook around \$5 billion to settle the investigation.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- 1951 Refugee Convention/ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
- Safety and Dignity: Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, 21 April 2016 (A/70/59)
- Combating terrorism and other acts of violence based on religion or belief (A/73/L.79)
- International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/73/296)
- Protection of migrants (A/RES/70/147)
- Migrant children and adolescents (A/RES/69/187)
- International migration and development (A/RES/69/229)
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)
- Protection of the human rights of migrants: the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (A/HRC/RES/35/17)

Possible Solutions

Decrease credibility of populists through fact-checking and challenging their rhetoric

To debunk refugee myths, in 2019, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and several tech firms like Google, Twitter, and Facebook (FB) developed an early-warning system to alert organizations rapidly about life-threatening disinformation to undermine it before it spreads. Apple also launched a media literacy initiative in 2019 to help people detect fake news. In November 2019, Twitter banned political advertisements, but Facebook (FB) failed to follow suit. This action needs tech companies and the government to target hateful rhetoric that leads to violence towards refugees; however, opponents pointed out that it would restrict freedom of speech and quoting Mark Zuckerberg, “political speech is important.”

Leaders of non-populist parties should demand populist leaders to provide detailed plans of policies to portray to voters that populist policies are ineffective and unfeasible, and that populists only campaign on rhetoric. Non-populist politicians should establish their campaign goals clearly and cater to the people to stop them from voting for populists. Politicians should also use their voices to speak against hatred and promote acceptance towards refugees. However, politicians are less incentivized to do so since campaigning on rhetoric is easier to gain sweeping victories.

Implementing/ bettering immigrant support services

The government can improve Immigrant support services so refugees can feel safer assimilating into a new environment. These services should include guidance with paperwork, job acquisition, language barriers, and integration. However, these programs require resources, and states may only be able to take in fewer refugees to cater to their needs. Nevertheless, taking fewer refugees but benefiting support services ensures that those accepted live higher quality lifestyles and are accepted.

Raising awareness of refugees through campaigns and social media

Organizations and citizens should raise awareness and learn about different cultures to prevent xenophobia from a lack of information. The media should portray the real human side of refugees; for example, the Somos Panas Columbian (We are Friends) campaign has reached more than six million and 235,000 politicians since its launch in December 2017. Since

celebrities have many followers, they will be effective in highlighting positive stories of refugees changing their lives and how the public can help. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), refugee advocates, and international organizations can further their agenda of helping refugees through social media. However, since many spread toxic narratives through social media, those that get information from social media need to be able to discern disinformation.

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