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MUN V
March 2025

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European Union

ESTABLISHING COMPREHENSIVE PROTOCOLS FOR THE REFUGEE CRISIS

EU BACKGROUND GUIDE

Topic: Establishing Comprehensive Protocols for the Refugee Crisis

Statement of the Problem

The refugee crisis is a global issue marked by millions of individuals fleeing their home countries in search of safety and stability. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of the end of 2023, more than 117 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, a figure representing a growth of over 8% in forced displacement across the globe (UNHRC). Within Europe, the situation remains particularly dire, with over 13 million **refugees** and displaced persons residing across European countries (UNHRC). This influx has exposed significant deficiencies in the European Union's (EU) external border management, **asylum** and migration policies, and broader humanitarian frameworks. The root causes of this crisis are multifaceted, spanning environmental disasters, political persecution, armed conflict, and economic instability. These factors are compounded by geopolitical tensions, as well as the strain of increasing numbers of refugees arriving at European borders.

The crisis' complexity lies in its intersection of policy, resources, and cultural considerations, which vary widely across nations. Some countries, such as Germany and Sweden, have shown greater willingness to accept asylum seekers, while others, such as Hungary and Poland, have pursued more restrictive approaches. These diverging policies have created a fragmented response to a humanitarian crisis that is inherently global. Beyond the social and economic challenges, the refugee crisis presents a profound issue of human rights and ethics, demanding international cooperation to protect vulnerable populations.

As the crisis continues to evolve, the international community faces immense challenges in developing a comprehensive and sustainable protocol that addresses the root causes, the immediate humanitarian needs, and long-term solutions for displaced populations. In this conference, delegates are expected to work toward establishing a unified framework that balances the responsibilities of host countries with the rights of refugees, while also ensuring the integration of long-term strategies for asylum, migration management, and border security within Europe.

History of the Problem

World War I

The aftermath of World War I resulted in the displacement of over 5 million people across Europe and the Middle East. The dissolution of the major empires—the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires—led to the forced migration of an estimated 1.5 million individuals who became ethnic or religious minorities in the newly formed nation-states. The Treaty of Sèvres and the subsequent Greco-Turkish War caused the forced population exchange of over 1.5 million Greeks and Turks between the two countries. Additionally, the systematic killing of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during and after the war displaced over 1 million Armenians, many of whom sought refuge in neighboring regions. The Russian Civil War and the rise of Bolshevism displaced millions of Russians, Ukrainians, and other minorities who opposed the new regime. It is estimated that over 2 million of these individuals became refugees in various European countries. In total, World War I led to the displacement of more than 5 million people across the affected regions. This unprecedented human crisis ultimately led to the establishment of organizations such as the League of Nations' High Commission for Refugees.

World War II

World War II caused the displacement of over 40 million people in Europe alone by the end of the conflict. This mass displacement was primarily driven by the systematic persecution and genocide carried out by the Nazi regime, which resulted in the displacement of approximately 6 million Jews, along with millions of other victims fleeing the Holocaust. Forced population transfers and ethnic cleansing campaigns by both the Axis and Allied powers uprooted large segments of European and Asian populations, with entire national and ethnic groups being forcibly relocated. The widespread destruction of cities, homes, and infrastructure during the war also left millions more seeking refuge and safety. The process of decolonization, such as the Partition of India in 1947, further contributed to refugee flows. In response to these challenges, the war prompted the creation of international organizations like the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which were tasked with coordinating resettlement efforts in the war's aftermath.

Current State

The ongoing crises in the Middle East, particularly the wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, as well as instability in parts of Africa, have resulted in millions of **internally**

displaced persons heading toward Europe. The UNHCR reports that by the end of 2023, over 10 million refugees had fled Syria alone, with many seeking asylums in European countries such as Germany, France, and Sweden (UNHCR). The scale of displacement, exacerbated by the prolonged nature of these conflicts, has tested the EU's capacity to respond effectively and equitably across its member states.

In addition to regional conflicts, the EU has also faced growing pressure from the influx of refugees due to the geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The Russia-Ukraine war, for example, has led to more than 13 million displaced persons, many of whom have sought refuge within EU borders, particularly in countries such as Poland, Slovakia, and Romania (UNHCR). The Israel-Palestine conflict has also contributed to rising numbers of refugees, with approximately 1.9 million people displaced in Gaza alone, further intensifying the migration flows into Europe (UNRWA). These ongoing conflicts highlight the EU's central role as a receiving region for asylum seekers, forcing the EU to grapple with issues of border control, national security, and social integration.

The EU's response to the refugee crisis has been a mix of humanitarian aid and political contention. The European Union has long had a framework for handling asylum seekers, including the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which aims to harmonize asylum procedures across member states. However, the system has been tested by the sheer volume of asylum seekers and the differing capacities of member states to manage them. In 2015, the EU faced its largest influx of refugees since World War II, with over 1 million people arriving that year alone, many of them through the Mediterranean. This led to a division among EU states over how to share the responsibility for asylum seekers. Countries like Germany and Sweden took in large numbers of refugees, while others, such as Hungary and Poland, adopted more restrictive policies, arguing that the influx of migrants posed a security threat and strained national resources (European Commission).

The EU's approach to handling the crisis has often been criticized for its lack of unity. While the European Commission has pushed for greater solidarity and responsibility-sharing, the Dublin Regulation, which determines which EU member state is responsible for processing asylum claims, has proven problematic. The regulation has placed a disproportionate burden on frontline states such as Greece, Italy, and Spain, where refugees first arrive. These countries often lack the resources to provide adequate housing, healthcare, and legal support, leading to overcrowded refugee camps and long processing times. The failure to reform the Dublin Regulation and create a fairer distribution system has led to tensions within the EU, with some member states accusing others of not doing their part in managing the crisis (European Council on Refugees and Exiles).

Despite these challenges, the EU has made significant strides in responding to the crisis. Initiatives such as the EU-Turkey deal, signed in 2016, aimed to curb the flow of migrants crossing the Aegean Sea, while relocation schemes sought to distribute refugees more evenly across EU countries. However, the effectiveness of these measures has been mixed, with some countries refusing to participate in relocation programs or limiting the number of refugees they accept. As the crisis continues, the EU faces the ongoing challenge of balancing humanitarian obligations with national security concerns, all while addressing the root causes of displacement and ensuring the protection and integration of refugees within the union.

Past Solutions

The main features of modern Europe's refugee policy stem from the Geneva convention of 1951. Considering the many people who sought to escape persecution after World War II, a legal precedent was set at the Geneva Convention, which recognized the status of refugees based on their status of displacement. Specifically, it defined a refugee to be anyone, who "As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951, and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (UNHRC)

Note that the convention is set in 1951, meaning that it would not apply to anyone resulted by further events. Moreover, in the preamble, it stated that countries did not have a responsibility to grant asylum, recognizing that postwar Europe was not yet ready to provide it. For instance, article 17, which was intended to guarantee employment opportunities to refugees, was treated as a recommendation.

While the convention failed to guarantee asylum for all refugees, it was able to agree upon certain minimal standards, which is the key to this convention. States were obliged to grant refugees identity papers (Article 27), travel documents (Article 28), the ability to transfer assets (Article 30), and support for naturalization (Article 34). Another key standard was Non-Refoulment: That no refugee should be returned to the country from which they are at risk of persecution.

The 1966 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees can be seen as an amendment to the limitations of the 1951, mainly that: the convention of 1951 stops considering refugees

related to events before 1951, that asylum was still not assured, and that a limited number of countries have decided to adopt it. In the first respect, it was a success, as it removed the date limit entirely. On the other hand, its adoption was still limited, and there was no guarantee that any State had the responsibility to provide asylum for refugees. In short, the ability to seek asylum was a human right, but the ability to be granted it was not.

In 1999, the European Union established the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to address three primary concerns: first, asylum shopping, where asylum seekers denied entry in one EU state would attempt to apply in another; second, the inconsistency among EU states in their treatment of refugees, which led to a disproportionate number of refugees being accepted by some member states; and third, the variance in social benefits offered to asylum seekers across member states. Overall, the CEAS aimed to eliminate these inconsistencies and create a more unified approach to asylum within the EU (MJI Online, 2023). The CEAS is officially divided into three stages: 1999–2005, 2008–2013, and 2015 to the present. During the first phase, six legislative instruments were introduced to establish minimum standards, including the Eurodac Regulation, the Temporary Protection Directive, the Reception of Asylum Seekers Directive, the Dublin Regulation (which replaced the 1990 Dublin Convention), the Qualification Directive, and the Asylum Procedures Directive (European Commission, 2023). Additionally, two important laws were enacted outside the CEAS framework: the Family Reunification Directive (2003), which granted entry to immediate family members of refugees (EUR-Lex, 2003), and the Returns Directive (2008), which established standards for the return of individuals who no longer required asylum (EUR-Lex, 2008). The second phase of the CEAS (2008–2013) marked a shift from minimum standards to the establishment of a more harmonized asylum procedure, further solidifying the EU's framework for managing asylum claims (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2024).

The European Union's most recent resolutions regarding the refugee crisis reflect ongoing efforts to address both immediate and long-term challenges faced by asylum seekers and member states. A key initiative is the 2024-2025 EU resettlement framework, which aims to resettle 20,000 refugees, expanding the EU's collective efforts to provide safe and legal pathways for asylum seekers (European Parliament, 2024). This initiative is part of broader migration and asylum reforms that seek to establish a more coordinated, sustainable system. In addition to resettlement, the EU continues to emphasize strengthening cooperation with third-party countries to improve migration management and reduce irregular flows. The European Commission has also proposed significant updates to the EU's asylum policy, focusing on making procedures more efficient, ensuring better protection for vulnerable groups, and addressing the root causes of migration (European Parliament, 2024). Moreover, a new "solidarity mechanism" has been introduced, allowing EU member states to support each other by redistributing asylum seekers across the Union in a more balanced and fair manner. These efforts,

although still under negotiation, aim to strike a balance between humanitarian support and the need for practical solutions to manage migration effectively across the EU.

Potential Solutions

The following are workable solutions that the EU office could offer to provide support for refugees in need:

- Providing greater protection for those at risk in their own countries by building on previously developed legal frameworks for refugees could help the safety of those at risk. The frameworks provide protection for those fleeing for a variety of causes such as persecution, conflict, and other dangers. By expanding and enforcing these frameworks to a greater degree than before, more vulnerable populations can receive broader care.
- Combating the root causes of migrant smuggling is able to help determine effective methods to stop a large and developed system. The issue of the refugee crisis consists of large and well facilitated networks that benefit from the vulnerabilities of at-risk refugees. Increased governance and security in selected regions can combat these systems of migrant smuggling.
- Increasing opportunities for settlement and resettlement within Europe can create greater options for labor migration towards Europe. Migrant smuggling is often driven by poverty, political instability, conflict, lack of economic opportunities, and countless other issues in the countries of origin. With lower barriers to gaining citizenship for potentially stable livelihoods that aid European nations in the long run, migrants are able to strive for more success in their new communities.

Bloc Formations

Welcoming: (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden)

Countries that have established policies to facilitate refugee integration, becoming welcoming destinations for migrants. These countries provide food, shelter, education, healthcare, and many necessary resources that allow migrants to reach better conditions. In addition, these countries may also provide protection that prevents the refugees from

being escorted back to their original countries as well as citizenship to grant them an official identity in the nation.

Welcoming but burdened: (Austria, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia)

Countries that actively accept refugees but have greater financial and logistical burdens. These countries may have similar policies to the Welcoming bloc but have issues like lack of supporting personnel, lack of available shelter, lack of comprehensive regulation plans, etc. such countries may call for more comprehensive solutions that include international support from countries that are in better-suited conditions and may provide the necessary help and guidance.

Cautious: (Czech Republic, Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia)

Countries that focus more on providing overseas aid and supporting refugee resettlement from camps rather than directly resettling large numbers. These nations are worried about issues like overcrowding, financial burdens, politics, etc. There are also usually different sided voices within the nation, with some supporting the welcoming of refugees and others being the opposite, and others in between.

Resistant: (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Romania)

Countries that are resistant to accepting refugees due to concerns about security and cultural preservation. They have pushed for stricter border controls and limits on refugees in the EU. These countries may also have the same concerns as the Cautious countries, but instead of providing aid they completely remove any connections with this issue

Key Terms

Refugee: The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines refugees as any person who "As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former

habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Asylum: The protection granted by a country to individuals fleeing their home country due to fear of persecution based on factors such as race, religion, nationality, or political opinion. It is a key human right under international law and requires the host country to assess the legitimacy of claims. The granting of asylum often sparks political debate, as it involves balancing humanitarian obligations with national security concerns. The asylum process can also strain resources in receiving countries, leading to complex social and economic challenges (UNHCR).

Internally displaced persons: Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are individuals who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, or natural disasters but remain within their home country's borders. Unlike refugees, they do not have access to the same international protections, and their safety depends largely on the effectiveness of their government. The displacement of large populations creates social and political challenges, often putting significant pressure on national governments and regional stability (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre).

Country of origin: The country of origin refers to the nation from which refugees or displaced persons flee due to threats like conflict, persecution, or environmental disasters. The political context of a country of origin often drives large-scale displacement, which can strain international relations and provoke diplomatic challenges. Countries of origin may face pressure from the international community for not protecting their citizens or addressing the root causes of displacement (UNHCR).

Receiving country: A receiving country is one that offers refuge to individuals fleeing conflict or persecution from their country of origin. Politically, these countries are obligated under international law to protect refugees, but their ability to do so can be constrained by domestic issues such as economic capacity, public opinion, and security concerns. The social integration of refugees in receiving countries often presents challenges, including access to healthcare, education, and employment (Betts).

Citizenship: Citizenship is the legal status that grants individuals rights and responsibilities within a particular country. For refugees or displaced persons, acquiring citizenship often represents the culmination of the integration process. The process can be contentious, as it raises questions of national identity, loyalty, and social cohesion. Citizenship is also crucial in determining access to social services and political participation (Joppke).

Deportation: Deportation is the formal removal of an individual from a country, typically due to violations of immigration laws or national security concerns. While some argue that deportation upholds national sovereignty, it can also be controversial when it

results in sending individuals back to unsafe environments. In the context of refugees, deportation may conflict with international protection obligations if individuals are at risk of harm upon return to their home country (Boswell).

Integration: Integration refers to the process through which refugees or migrants adapt to and become part of the social, cultural, and economic life of their receiving country. Successful integration policies help refugees contribute positively to society, while unsuccessful ones can lead to social exclusion or conflict. Politically, integration involves creating opportunities for refugees to access education, employment, and social services, which can be challenging depending on public opinion and resource availability (Castles).

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