

The Rise of Self-Reliant Aid Initiatives During the Post-Cold War Refugee Crises

ECON 496RW: Independent Study Research Paper

Belicia Rodriguez
btrodr2@emory.edu
December 10, 2019

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Average Refugee Population Trends from 1951-2018	1
3	The Development of Self-Reliant Strategies	3
3.1	From Traditional to Self-Reliant Humanitarianism	3

1 Introduction

After the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, many aid agencies realized their traditional humanitarian methods could not handle the global increase in the number of refugees, who were escaping the political and economic instability caused by the war. The principles of traditional humanitarian aid were to not only save the lives of refugees from violent conflicts but also support the livelihood of refugees. As a result, aid agencies would build temporary housing camps for refugees, where they would provide food, water, and other living necessities until refugees felt they could safely return to their home countries. However, the refugees who were residing in camps after the Cold War did not see the conditions in their home countries improving. Aid agencies did not budget for these refugee situations to become protracted, which is defined as a minimum of five-year period where refugees cannot return home.¹ In response to the rise of protracted situations, refugee aid organizations had to redefine the responsibility of humanitarianism and emphasize self-sufficiency initiatives that allowed refugees to decrease dependency on aid agencies.

2 Average Refugee Population Trends from 1951-2018

During the Cold War period, which spanned between the end of the 1940s to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the number of refugees worldwide grew from 3 million in 1973 to 21

¹United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR. *Protracted Refugee Situations*. URL: www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/standcom/40c982172/protracted-refugee-situations.html.

million in 1993, a roughly ten-fold increase in a twenty-year period.² To better understand the rapidly changing population trends during this time period, the UNHCR publishes data on the demographics of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons through their refugee population statistics database. The trends revealed through the data further show the rapid and massive increases in the number of refugees the UNHCR had to support, further demonstrating that the UNHCR needs to develop new humanitarian strategies in order to meet the demands for refugee assistance after the Cold War.

Figure 1 shows the yearly average population of refugees entering one of the seven sub-regions in the world. All seven regions have their largest average refugee populations fluctuations and peaks during the period of the Cold War. The region with the highest average population increase is central and southern Asia, which includes Pakistan and Iran. According to the data-set, in 1979, Pakistan had 400 thousand refugees from Afghanistan, and by 1991, more than 3 million Afghan refugees were residing in Palestine.³ Iran also received a large number of refugees from Afghanistan; in 1979, Iran had 100 thousand Afghan refugees, and by 1991, Iran also had more than 3 million Afghan refugees.⁴ This major influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan and Iran is most likely caused by the start of the Afghan War in 1978, where the Soviet-backed Afghan communist government fought against the anti-communist Muslim guerillas.⁵ Although the Afghan-War ended in 1992, the political and economic turmoil in Afghanistan continues even to today, resulting in many Afghan refugees not returning to their home country. In addition, the declining donor assistance, refugee fatigue, and weak economy put strains on Pakistan.⁶ In order to address both needs of the protracted Afghan refugee situation and the declining donor assistance, the UNHCR needed to rethink how refugees could receive a stable source of funding for long-term situations, and this restructuring could not only benefit the Afghan refugees but also refugees in the other global regions.

Although their total population numbers were not as high as those in central and southern Asia, the other sub-regions saw a large increase in their number of refugees during the Cold War period. In sub-Saharan Africa, Somalia saw the number of Ethiopian refugees, who were most likely escaping the Ethiopian Civil War, roughly double from 600 thousand in 1978 to 1.2 million in 1979.⁷ Many countries in Europe and North America such as Germany and the United States of America had an influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees during the 1950s up to the 1980s.⁸ In eastern and southeastern Asia, Hong Kong accepted 1.25 million

²United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR. *Population Statistics*. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=R1xq>.

³UNHCR, *Population Statistics*.

⁴UNHCR, *Population Statistics*.

⁵The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Soviet invasion of Afghanistan*. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Soviet-invasion-of-Afghanistan>.

⁶Amina Khan. "Protracted Afghan Refugee Situation: Policy Options for Pakistan". In: *Strategic Studies* 37.1 (2017).

⁷UNHCR, *Population Statistics*.

⁸UNHCR, *Population Statistics*.

in 1996,⁹ which is most likely due to the Sino-Soviet conflicts. The Cold War displaced millions of people worldwide. Although some refugees were able to return to their host countries after a short amount of time, many refugees still saw their countries of origin as unstable and unsafe during the 1990s and 2000s. In order for refugees to be supported in their host countries for an extended period of time, the UNHCR created strategies that would help refugees support themselves and help integrate refugees into the economy of the host countries.

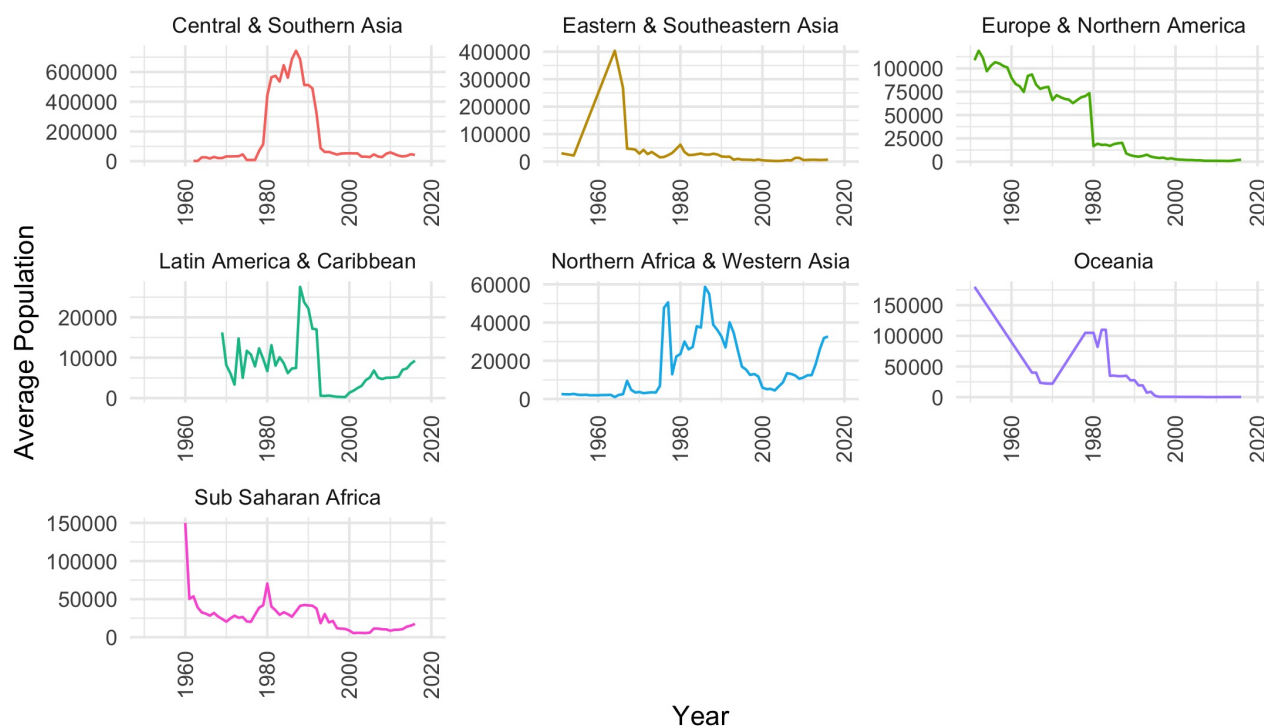


Figure 1: Average refugee population entering one of the seven global-regions between 1951-2018

Note: The RMarkdown and RScript used to generate this section's statistics and line graphs can be found in my GitHub repository

3 The Development of Self-Reliant Strategies

3.1 From Traditional to Self-Reliant Humanitarianism

Before implementing any new strategies, the UNHCR first addressed the post-Cold War refugee crises as if they were emergencies. Emergency crises are categorized as sudden violent conflicts or political upheaval where a group is pushed out of the country, and emergency operations require aid to be delivered rapidly on a short notice.¹⁰ Once aid is delivered and refugees have the resources needed to recover from emergency conflicts, aid agencies transition into the repatriation and reintegration portion of their refugee strategy, where refugees return and reintegrate back into their home countries. However, by the 2000s, international organizations noticed that their emergency-responses were not functional because the political and economic situations in refugees' home countries were not resolved, resulting in most refugees residing in their host countries longer than expected. The UNHCR decided

⁹UNHCR, *Population Statistics*.

¹⁰United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR. *Emergencies*. URL: www.unhcr.org/en-us/emergencies.html.

to abandon the emergency-response strategies, not only because they were not working, but also because the UNHCR was running out of funding for these types of responses.

Donors lost interest in supporting refugee crises that required aid for an extended period of time. From their perspective, these types of situations showed no progress towards a solution, and donors wanted to see results from their generosity.¹¹ Without additional investment, the UNHCR did not have the funding to maintain their traditional humanitarian responses, and they also did not have funding to initiate any self-reliant strategies. As a result, the UNHCR and other aid organizations decided to market refugees as investments instead of as charity, emphasizing that refugees should not be seen as a burden but instead as having "productive potential".¹² In this manner, the UNHCR could raise the funds needed to implement these long-term solutions.

By increasing their funding, the UNHCR began to implement self-reliant strategies for refugees in protracted situations. In order for refugees to become self-reliant, they needed to be integrated into the economy of their host country. However, host countries had become more resistant to the long-term presence of refugees.¹³ In addition, many host countries isolated their refugees in camps at the border of their country, where there was very little potential for economic growth.¹⁴ For refugees to be self-reliant, the host countries must agree to have refugees be relocated out of camps and into local communities.

If host countries agreed to have refugees moved out of camps, refugees will most likely be integrating into low-income local communities. One of the major issues with refugees moving into lower-income communities is while refugees are receiving aid from international organizations, the locals are receiving no assistance. As a result, locals could develop resentment towards refugees, making it difficult for refugees to fully integrate into the community.¹⁵ To prevent any resentment from developing amongst the local people, the UNHCR has to offer the locals the same assistance as the refugees, which not only benefits the locals but also helps refugees become more self-sufficient in their host countries. With the outline of self-reliance strategies drawn, the UNHCR and other aid organizations started implementing these methods to many post-Cold War refugee situations around the world.

End of Writing Sample

¹¹Karen Jacobsen. *The Economic Life of Refugees* (Ch. 5-6). Kumarian Press, 2005.

¹²Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees* (Ch. 5-6).

¹³Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees* (Ch. 5-6).

¹⁴Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees* (Ch. 5-6).

¹⁵Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees* (Ch. 5-6).