

Committee:	Human Rights Council
Issue:	The refugee crisis caused by the militant actions of the Islamic State
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Position:	President

I - Introduction

The beginning of the Syrian conflict in March 2011 marked the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis. Five years of ongoing conflict has forced millions to leave their homes, either seeking asylum in other countries or becoming internally displaced. As of December 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has registered over 4.93 million Syrian refugees, including 2.1 Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, 1.9 million in Turkey, and 26,000 in North Africa, whereas an estimated 6.5 million have become internally displaced.

In June 2014, the city of Mosul in Iraq was taken over by the Islamic State (IS). This transformed the scale of the pre-existing Syrian refugee crisis; a refugee crisis caused by the militant actions of Islamic State in a number of countries and regions, mainly Syria and Iraq, began as a result.

The majority of the refugees have been taken in by Syria's neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. In addition, the European Union continues to receive asylum applications from refugees fleeing the Islamic State, having received 800,000 thus far. NGOs UN-affiliated agencies, and independent agencies have played important roles in providing humanitarian aid throughout the crisis.

The refugee crisis has also caused a crisis of humanitarian proportions. Bureaucracy, human rights abuses, human trafficking, and violence are few among many challenges these refugees face. Conditions in refugee camps are often poor as well, with widespread disease and lack of sanitation, water, and healthcare. This is the reason why many refugees choose to make the dangerous journey to Europe through the Balkans or across the Mediterranean. Therefore, the general protection of refugees and the humanitarian crisis are the main focuses of this issue.



II - Parties Involved

Islamic State (IS)

Islamic State activity in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has created millions of refugees. While other factors are also responsible for the growth in numbers of refugees, it should be noted that the scale of the crisis only grew after IS grew in power and took over vast amounts of land in both Iraq and Syria. IS also has branches in Libya and Afghanistan, which are two other countries from which refugees are fleeing. Air strikes against IS have only caused more people to flee their homes.

European Union

After initial reluctance to take in refugees, the EU decided to take in a meagre 160,000 refugees in September 2015 through a quota system but have received 800,000 applications for asylum thus far. Around 750,000 migrants have made the journey to Europe, most of which are refugees. The majority of refugees choose to apply in Germany (over 331,000 applications), Sweden, and Serbia. Transit countries such as Macedonia and Hungary have been criticised for their measures which include building walls and closing borders, leaving thousands stranded, to slow the flow of refugees through Europe.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR is one of the key providers of humanitarian aid for refugees. Throughout the conflict, they have been assisting refugees and working with NGOs and governments to deliver the necessary aid. This UN agency has also been working to raise awareness, raise funds, and to protect the rights of refugees.

Lebanon

Over one million refugees have been registered in Lebanon. There are no refugee camps in Lebanon; refugees stay in rented or makeshift housing, which has made humanitarian efforts very difficult. Fears of conflict escalation have become a reality as Syrian conflict has begun to spill over into Lebanon: there have been bombings in Beirut as well as street fighting in Tripoli.



Iraq

After a movement of nearly 40,000 Syrian refugees into Iraq in 2013, IS militant actions in Iraq sparked a second refugee crisis in June 2014. The UNHCR reported in July 2014 that 1.9 million Iraqis had been displaced internally or into other countries; this number has risen since then. Iraq houses 245,000 registered Syrian refugees; in areas such as the Kurdistan Region, Syrians outnumber Kurds. The Islamic State continues to control a vast proportion of territory in Iraq, which has resulted in a rise in Iraqi refugees.

Turkey

Turkey is one of the main transit countries for refugees. As of December 2015, 2.3 million Syrian refugees have been registered in Turkey, half of which are children. At the beginning of the conflict, Turkey funded its own efforts to house refugees, but has now enlisted support from NGOs such as the UNHCR. Syrian refugees, due to an exception written into the original 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, do not have access to all the legal safeguards in Turkey that refugees elsewhere do – protection and assistance is still provided despite this. In September 2014, there was also a movement of over 80,000 Iraqi refugees into Turkey.

Syria

Syria is the origin of most of the refugees affected by IS actions. The civil war in Syria began in 2011 after the uprising against President Assad and has internally displaced 6.5 million people while another 4.4 million have fled the country. Military confrontation between a number of groups, including but not limited to Syrian government forces, IS, Syrian opposition (mainly the Free Syrian Army), and forces from the autonomous Kurdistan regions, has continued since then, and the number of people affected by the conflict continues to increase.

Jordan

The United Nations reported that, as of February 2015, 622,000 refugees had been registered in Jordan with 80,000 in Camp Za’atri alone. Amid fears of a spillover of conflict, in



addition to the Jordanian government is facing great pressure to currently struggling to accommodate all of these refugees and it has become apparent that their current approach to this issue has become somewhat unsustainable. The refugees are housed mainly in the north of the country, where refugee camps have become overcrowded and

III - Definition of Key Terms

refugee:

According to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is defined as an individual who is, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, outside the country of their 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. A refugee becomes an asylum seeker once they apply for asylum.

militant actions:

'Militant actions' refers to vigorously active and aggressive action which is taken in support of a cause; it can also mean actions of warfare or combat

humanitarian crisis:

A humanitarian crisis constitutes a situation or series of events in which the health, safety and wellbeing of a group of people are threatened, usually following some sort of conflict.



IV - General Overview

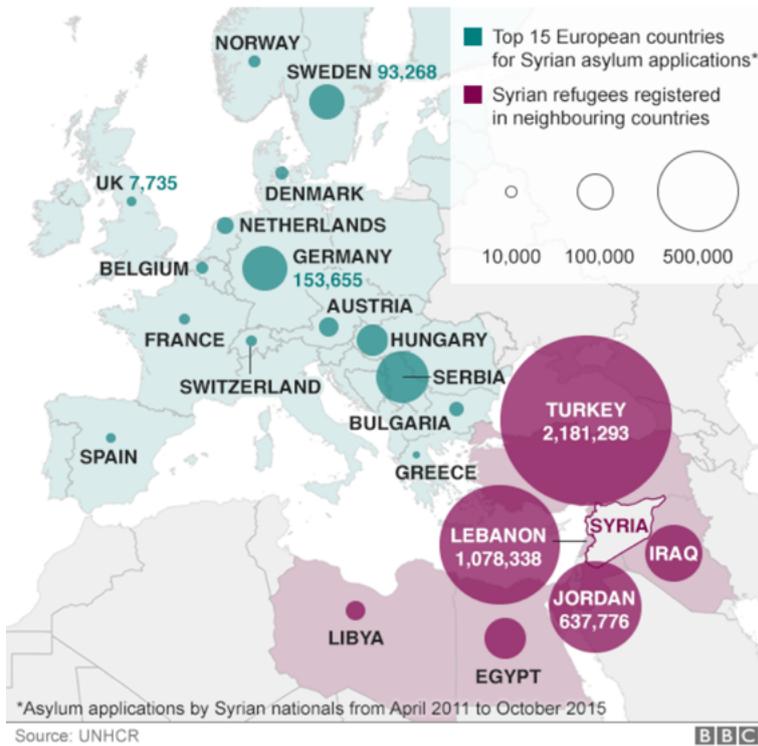
The Syrian refugee crisis began in March 2011 after pro-democracy protests against the current president, Bashar Al-Assad, took place in Deraa. Soon after, protests spread all over the country demanding the resignation of President Assad. In response to the government's use of force to crush the protests, arms were taken up by opposition supporters. Rather than a conflict between Assad's government and those against him, the conflict also puts Syria's Sunni majority against the the majority Shia Alawite government. The further introduction of the Islamic State has deeply worsened the situation.

The fighting eventually reached Aleppo and Damascus, the two largest cities. By August 2015, the death toll had risen to 250,000. War crimes and human rights violations have been committed by both sides and Islamic State activity has increased, causing a movement of millions to other areas of the Middle East, apart from Israel. Islamic State has been accused of a terror campaign in Syria: severe punishments are given to those who do not accept their rule, which include public executions and amputations. The group has also carried out mass killings of religious minorities and is generally attempting to forcefully exert their rule on the civilians. Half of the Syrian population has either fled the country, seeking refuge elsewhere, or fled their homes, becoming internally displaced, as a result of these actions.

The refugee crisis has also created a humanitarian crisis. The countries which have taken refugees in are now facing a number of difficulties, including poverty, disease, strain on infrastructure, cases in which refugees outnumber locals, and economic problems. Certain countries are carrying much heavier burdens than others. On the side of the refugees, long bureaucracy, human rights abuses, human trafficking, and violence are few among many challenges they face. Conditions in refugee camps are often poor as well, with widespread disease and lack of sanitation, water, and healthcare. They are often overcrowded, lack access to education, sufficient nutrition, or suitable living conditions. In Jordan, for example, the presence of refugees in urban areas has severely impacted the housing market and availability of affordable housing.



Syrians in neighbouring countries and Europe



This map depicts the distribution of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and Europe.

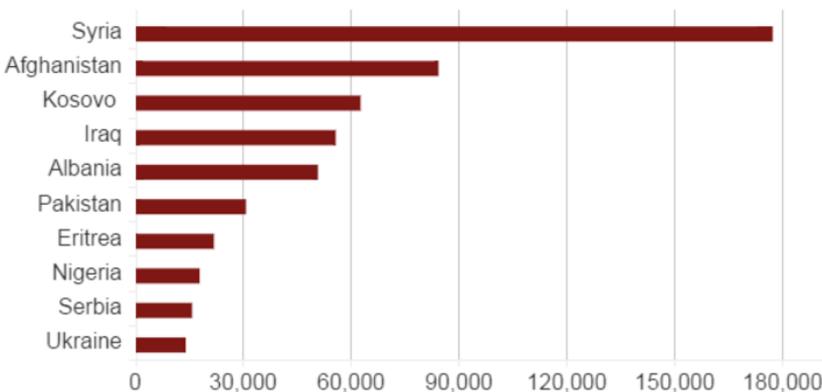
Source: UNHCR, BBC

European countries, having shown some initial reluctance to take refugees in, have now received 800,000 applications

for asylum. From October 2015 to December 2015, the applications for Germany have more than doubled. A picture of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, drowned on a Turkish beach, shocked the world earlier this year. The journey refugees make to reach Europe is extremely dangerous and has caused many deaths. Human trafficking is also an issue, as many refugees enter Europe illegally.

Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU

January - October 2015, first-time applications



A chart depicting the origins of the people applying for asylum in the EU.

Source: Eurostat, BBC

Source: Eurostat



While the media focuses on Syrian refugees, it should be noted that the presence of Islamic State in other countries has created non-Syrian refugees as well. For example, fighting near villages in Iraq has caused many people to become internally displaced, while others have taken to fleeing the country entirely. Those in Iran, having felt the political instability and experienced the violence have, too, fled their country of origin – some Afghan Hazara refugees in Iran flee two different conflicts. There have also been cases of refugee children being abducted from countries like Iran and turned into child soldiers to fight against IS. Generally, the presence of Islamic State has descended the conflict into near chaos.

The conflict has also begun to spill over into countries like Lebanon. This is not something delegates should focus on, but it should be taken into consideration when approaching solutions for the refugee crisis as a whole.

Although the question of the refugee crisis is a broad one, delegates should focus on solutions for the humanitarian crisis rather than a political solution. Delegates should also remember that while the conflict has caused the refugee crisis, it is not within the power of the Human Rights Council to end the conflict, nor does ending the conflict solve the humanitarian crisis.

V - Timeline

Date	Event
<i>March 2011</i>	Pro-democracy protests begin and begin to spread nationwide in April. UN begins investigations into war crimes and human rights violations around this time.
<i>April 2011</i>	The Syrian refugee crisis begins after up to 5000 refugees flee to Lebanon.
<i>May 2011</i>	Turkey opens its first refugee camps and begins to assume one of the largest roles in welcoming refugees.



<i>March 2012</i>	The UNHCR appoints a Regional Refugee coordinator for Syria. Bekaa in Lebanon becomes Lebanon's principle destination for refugees.
<i>April 2012</i>	Ahead of the UN ceasefire, over 2,500 refugees travel from Syria to Turkey in one day.
<i>July 2012</i>	The Za'atri Refugee Camp opens in Jordan.
<i>September 2012</i>	The UNCHR reports 11,000 people fleeing into Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon within a 24-hour time period.
<i>December 2012</i>	The number of Syrian refugees hosted in neighbouring countries surpasses 500,000.
<i>March 2013</i>	The Islamic State takes over the Syrian city of Raqqa.
<i>September 2013</i>	The number of Syrian refugees passes 2 million; half are children. The number of those internally displaced stands at 4.25 million.
<i>October 2013</i>	Turkey builds a two-metre wall on the Syrian border; Bulgaria follows suit in November, building a wall on the Turkish border.
<i>December 2013</i>	The United Nations estimates that nearly 75% of Syria's 22.4 million population will be in need of humanitarian aid in 2014; an appeal for \$6.5 billion is launched.
<i>June 2014</i>	A new refugee crisis, caused by the actions of the Islamic State begins in the Middle East as the Islamic State takes over the Iraqi city of Mosul. Later in the month, IS announces their caliphate in both Syria and Iraq. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, expresses concern over IS fighters "actively seeking out and killing soldiers, police and civilians, whom they perceive as being associated with the government."



<i>September 2014</i>	IS attacks along the Syrian-Turkish border sparks a movement of 130,000 Syrian Kurds in September.
<i>October 2014</i>	Jordan begins to refuse entry to Syrians. Siege of Turkish border city Kobani begins. Rise in infectious diseases among refugees in Bekaa, Lebanon. Italy ends its search and rescue mission off the Libyan coast for migrants and refugees, replaced by a mission headed by Frontex.
<i>December 2014</i>	Record number of asylum applications in the EU, 626,000 in 2014.
<i>June 2015</i>	Hungary announces it plans to build a fence along the Hungarian-Serbian border. Construction starts in July.
<i>August 2015</i>	The UNHCR reports that 50,000 migrants and refugees arrived in Greece in July. Over 70 migrants and refugees are found dead in an abandoned truck in Austria.
<i>September 2015</i>	Pictures of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, drowned on a Turkish beach, surface online. Refugees begin to move into Western Europe in large numbers. Border controls in Europe are introduced. Russia carries out its first air strikes in Syria.
<i>November 2015</i>	The UNCHR announces 744,000 people have arrived in Europe so far in 2015.

VI - Previous Solutions

The United Nations has passed a number of resolutions on the Syrian conflict as a whole, and a number on the humanitarian crisis. The Security Council Resolution 2139 passed on 22 February 2014 is one such resolution. However, the most significant solutions have been actions taken by individual governments, NGOs, and agencies.



Countries neighbouring Syria, including Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, have thus far allowed all refugees fleeing the Islamic State in, despite fears that the conflict will spill over. These fears have recently become a reality, with bombings in Beirut in November as well as attacks, for which IS has been blamed, in Turkey. The means to provide aid and accommodation to refugees in these countries has been growing thin, with the Jordanian government especially strained; the policy of allowing all refugees in is somewhat unsustainable when a country houses a large proportion of them. There is a lack of funds and of international aid, and poverty, disease, and violence are beginning to spread through camps.

In terms of resettlement, more is being done in the Middle East than anywhere else. Until late 2014, the EU limited its assistance to refugees in the form of humanitarian aid. However, while Turkey houses 2 million refugees, the entirety of Europe, and the EU in particular, has only received 800,000 applications for asylum.

Possibly the only way to effectively end the refugee crisis is to end the Syrian conflict or continue the fight against IS. Attempts to solve the Syrian conflict have thus far yielded unsuccessful results; currently, many countries including the United Kingdom and the United States of America have begun air strikes in Syria against IS. While meant to target the Islamic State, many Syrians have fled their homes in response to these strikes. However, ending the conflict will not solve the humanitarian crisis.

VII - Possible Solutions

Possible solutions to alleviate the humanitarian crisis caused by the refugee crisis may include improving the conditions of refugee camps, providing an alternative to human trafficking, preventing human rights violations, and providing funding for countries housing large numbers of refugees.

Conditions in refugee camps are often very poor, with a lack of sanitation, healthcare, education, as well as being overcrowded. This makes refugees extremely vulnerable to physical illnesses as well as mental illness due to the trauma they have experienced. More efforts should be taken to improve conditions in refugee camps, with further co-operation and funding schemes with NGOs. However, the fragility and vulnerability of countries in the Middle East housing refugees should be taken into consideration as there is a risk of destabilisation.



Furthermore, the human trafficking situation has become very dire: fearing that they will not be able to enter Europe legally, refugees choose the extremely dangerous illegal route. An alternative to this could be making legal routes of entry more affordable or easier. To prevent refugee deaths, search and rescue operations could be implemented. Putting up fences and closing borders only encourages more human trafficking – countries must take care not to engage in such practices. In addition, many children are turned into child soldiers regardless of whether they have left the conflict areas or not. Protection of children is thus one of the top priorities. This can be done, again, through cooperation with NGOs. Many NGOs help unaccompanied minors once they reach their transit/destination countries; these could be financially supported.

Preventing human rights violations is more difficult to do as parts of the Middle East have become a war zone. Therefore, prevention of abuses should be focused on in transit and destination countries. More international cooperation is required for this crisis, especially with NGOs like the UNHCR. Refugees must also be made aware of their rights for this to happen.

Other articles on resettlement, encouraging more UN member states to open their borders to refugees; funding; and awareness campaigns to combat xenophobia could be worthwhile additions to the treaty.

VIII - Useful documents and links

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

- <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>

A/HRC/30/L.5/Rev.1 on the grave and deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

- http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_hrc_res_30_10.pdf

Human Rights Watch World Report 2015: Syria

- <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/syria>

OHCHR Factsheet #20 on Human Rights and Refugees

- <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet20en.pdf>



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