

# General Assembly 3- Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Establishing measures to ensure the  
integration of refugees into society



<b>Forum:</b>	General Assembly 3- Social, Humanitarian and Cultural
<b>Issue:</b>	Establishing measures to ensure the integration of refugees into society
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<b>Position:</b>	Chair

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## Introduction

It is fundamental in a society which, today, has over 65 million people in refugee status, that we find measures to integrate such people into their new societies so that they may be brought into equal social status, position, and contribution as any other member of society. Oftentimes, refugees leave countries not because they seek to find better economic opportunities elsewhere, but out of sheer necessity: it is simply not possible for their basic safety and/or human rights to be guaranteed in the country from which they emigrate.

Upon arrival in their host country, however, it is very often the case that they are not treated with the level of dignity and respect that is accorded to the majority of citizens. Refugees are often viewed as stateless, and therefore having an inherently reduced social status, as well as being the potential cause of problems in their country of reception. As such, violence, racism, and other sources of tension are often sparked. Nonetheless, we must bear in mind when discussing this topic that asylum seeking is a human right to which all are entitled; the question therefore becomes about how to successfully integrate migrants rather than how to stop them from migrating. Once the status of refugee is granted, the government of a host country is obliged to provide for the refugees

The situation in which many of these refugees live is not one that is stable or permanent. For example, the numerous refugee camps in Calais, France, show that many people who have fled their home countries often end up in living conditions that are not much improved. With the exponential growth of conflicts that uproot people around the world, we must pose ourselves the

following questions: How can we integrate refugees into their new societies? What would be the best course of action to ensure that this is successful across a wide range of countries?

## Definition of Key Terms

### Refugee

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. (1) As a result, refugees often have a well-based fear of certain political authorities or groups that have directly caused their displacement. In the majority of cases, refugees either cannot return to their country of origin or are afraid to do so because of great risk to themselves and their families. It is important to note that over half of the world's refugees come from just three countries: Afghanistan, Syria, and South Sudan. (1) It is important to distinguish between refugees and asylum seekers, however. An asylum seeker is 'someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed' , while a refugee has been accorded a specific legal status. Every year, around one million people seek asylum. (2)

### Host country

Country of destination or a third country for migrants. In the case of return or repatriation, this is also the country of origin. 'Host Country' can be defined simply as any country that has agreed and thus obligated itself to receive a certain number of refugees and migrants on a regular basis by presidential, ministerial or parliamentary decision. (3)

### Integration

Integration is the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. This definition of integration is deliberately left open, because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country. (4)

However, in this context integration will be defined as allowing refugees to participate equally in the society into which they have moved by affording them equal social and cultural rights. This will

allow for the refugees to become active members of society and contribute to and enrich the economy and culture.

## Xenophobia

Xenophobia is difficult to define at the international level, but is generally described as an intense fear and/or hatred of foreigners. This is often at the crux of a plethora of the issues that cause difficulties with the integration of refugees.

## Migration

Migration is the movement of people, generally across borders. It is usually classified as a population movement, and in this context can be seen as the 'transitory phase' between the country of origin of the refugee and the host country. The migratory process can take anywhere from weeks to years.

## Refugee camp

A refugee camp is a temporary form of large-scale accommodation built to house refugees or asylum-seekers. An example is the large camp in Calais, France. Often, these are composed of tents or other forms of shelter that are not permanent housing.

## Non-refoulement

The policy of 'non-refoulement' comes from the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees. The official policy is as follows:

"No Contracting State shall expel or return (*"refouler"*) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." (4)

Essentially, it stipulates that no refugee be returned from their host country to the original country of persecution.

## General overview

The initial issue of granting refugee status is already rather difficult for many governments for various reasons. Nonetheless, once this status has been granted, the process of integration remains a struggle: the question remains of how to facilitate refugees becoming equal participants in their host country's society. There are many examples of successful integration throughout history: this can be seen, for example, in the fact that 34.5 million Americans claim Irish descent, which is a direct result of mass Irish immigration to the United States. (5) However, refugees often face discrimination because they are seen as stateless and a burden on resources, despite the fact that they often contribute enormously to a country's sociocultural development and economy. Local integration into a community does however remain a complicated process because it has legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It imposes considerable demands on both the individual and the receiving society. (6) This is even more so the case when there are considerable language or cultural barriers between the host countries and the refugees' countries of origin, and if integration is to be successful these barriers must be overcome so as to prevent them from being obstacles.

## Causes of irregular migratory patterns

After sociological analysis, two main determining factors that cause migration have been discovered: 'push' factors, and 'pull' factors. 'Push' factors are essentially undesirable or unsafe conditions in the country of origin that make it necessary for the population in question to migrate thence. 'Pull' factors, on the other hand, are opportunities that appear more attractive in the host country which therefore make it more attractive to migrants. However, the majority of people

granted refugee status have largely been displaced due to push factors, usually war, discrimination, or another form of persecution. Currently, the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. (7) There are currently near 70 million displaced people in the world, among which 22.5 million refugees. Of these 22.5 million, over 12 million are minors (under 18). This flux of migration can be attributed in large part to numerous conflicts around the world, such as those in South Sudan and Syria, who, along with Afghanistan, make up over half of the current refugee population. Largely because of unsafe conditions both for the refugees themselves and for their families and the security of their children/dependants, there is an unprecedented number of refugees flowing from these countries primarily into Europe. These conflicts are therefore the primary cause of the numbers of refugees today.

## Education and healthcare

The majority of refugees today come from conflict zones: as such, there is a great amount of trauma that they have experienced which results in several prevalent issues such as frequent feelings of betrayal, mistrust and fear. It is essential that, to successfully integrate refugees, they are provided with access to healthcare so that they are able to be a functional and equal part of their new society.

Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognises “the right ... [to] the highest possible standards of physical and mental health” (8) However, this right is often not realised, or realised to a greatly reduced extent, for refugees. In order for the equal participation of everyone in any society, it is known that physical and mental health, as well as intellectual capacity, are paramount. By and large, however, refugees, especially those under 18 whose education has been interrupted, are often employed in low-skill jobs that do not provide healthcare benefits. While there are no restrictions on emergency healthcare within Europe as the Council of

Europe has defined it as an irrevocable human right (9), the language barrier and issues of discrimination often reduce the willingness or ability of refugees to access healthcare.

Evidence has also shown that refugees are more likely to suffer from acute mental and physical health problems, notably PTSD and depression arising from organised violence, torture, forced resettlement, mistreatment during migration, and other human rights violations. (10) Especially with victims of orchestrated violence, there is a tendency to suffer from more chronic physical issues such as malunited fractures, neuropathies, and epilepsy, which require treatment in the long term. Additionally, due to the often poor conditions on their migration route and in the refugee camps, they are more susceptible to non-communicable and communicable diseases which are normally treatable, such as Hepatitis A and B. Access to healthcare, despite these issues, is often limited by legislation in many countries. While countries that accept refugees, such as Norway, France, or Sweden, offer preliminary health checks for incoming refugees, the thoroughness of these is somewhat dubious and they often overlook mental health issues. (11) Additionally, practical details such as insufficient documentation or lack of medical records exacerbate the difficulty of healthcare access for refugees.

‘As an empowering right and a public good, education is the primary way by which economically and socially marginalised adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their societies.’ (12) Nevertheless, only 61% of refugee children attend primary school, compared with a global average of 91%; this drops again when looking at secondary school, in which 23% of refugee children are enrolled compared to 84% globally, with only 1% of refugee youth receiving tertiary education, as oppose to 36% globally. (13) However, if we are to provide refugees with equal ability to contribute to society, we must provide them with equal opportunity.

## Language

Language is often a barrier to refugees being able to communicate. (14) As such, it can lead to feelings of isolation and make it very difficult for refugees to find work and forge relationships within their new communities. This is especially a problem when we consider the fact that a large proportion of refugees are under 18, and many countries have legislation which require that an immigrant under 18 have some form of training or educational qualification by the time they reach the age of majority. For example, in France, it is required that for any refugee under 18 complete an apprenticeship or acquire a diploma which they begin six months before they become 18. (15) Without language skills, the opportunities for work and for the acquisition of qualifications are reduced. Furthermore, the state will often no longer provide foster care for minor refugees once they reach the age of majority, which is an integral part of language acquisition. As such, if they are not settled and qualified by this point, it can lead to feelings of depression and has even resulted in suicide. (15)

## Housing

Refugee camps are suitable for temporary influxes of refugees; however, this is not an adequate permanent solution. The entire notion of refugee camps is that they are impermanent, but this becomes obsolete and redundant as the situation becomes increasingly permanent; indeed, the average refugee spends 12 years in a refugee camp. (16). The UNHCR recommends that each refugee is provided with 20 litres of water per person per day (16). Nonetheless, many refugee camps fail to meet these standards.

Moreover, living in a camp, regardless of the amenities it does or does not have, creates isolation from the local community, and without employment and integration, refugees are disconnected and unable to practice their skills and feel fulfilled. In Australia, for example, refugees are often kept on islands with inadequate healthcare facilities which completely inhibits any chance of integration. (17)

## Non-refoulement and deportation

Non-refoulement is the policy of not returning refugees to the original country in which they were subject to persecution. However, in order for this not to occur, it is essential that the refugees be integrated and are able to contribute actively to their new society, making it far less likely for them to be deported. Otherwise, this deportation is more likely to be a viable option for the government if they do not feel that they are gaining economically from the influx of migrants.

The only exception to the principle of non-refoulement is is “The benefit of the present provision [i.e. Article 33(1) referred to above] may not however be claimed by a refugee whom there are reasonable grounds for regarding as a danger to the security of the country in which he is, or who, having been convicted by a final judgement of a particularly serious crime, constitutes a danger to the community of that country.” (4) However, governments must establish legitimate legal grounds for expulsion and ensure it is not based on xenophobia or other subconscious factors.

## Major Parties Involved

### UNHCR

The UNHCR is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It is a United Nations organisation that is mandated to support, protect, and uphold the rights of all refugees around the world. As such, it is the most integral organisation concerning integration, voluntary repatriation, and resettlement to a third country. (19)

## IOM

Established in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organisation in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. (20)

They are the main body that work with refugee camps.

## Turkey

Turkey has had the greatest number of refugees of any country, with 3.5 million to date. Of these refugees, 90% are Syrian. (21) The close proximity of Turkey to Syria, from which one of modern human history's largest exoduses is arising, is a strong contributing factor to this large number.

## Pakistan

Pakistan hosts more than 1.4 million registered Afghans who have been forced to flee their homes. (22) The original source of this mass-migration was when the then USSR invaded Afghanistan. However, the Pakistani government has struggled recently with this, having released a statement saying that 'Pakistan's economy has carried the burden of hosting Afghan refugees since long and in the present circumstances cannot sustain it further.' (23) There may therefore be changes in the situation.

## European Union

The European Union is a key player in the integration of refugees, notably because of the large influx of refugees from various parts of Africa, such as South Sudan, and especially Syria. Oftentimes, these asylum seekers arrive by boat in very dangerous conditions to 'frontier countries', such as Greece, Italy, and, to a lesser extent, Spain. In a resolution passed in July 2016, Parliament called on the EU to take action and ensure refugees are swiftly and fully integrated into the labour market and society. The resolution underlined the importance of education and sport, and called on EU countries to help migrant teachers and professors find teaching jobs. (24)

## Timeline of key events

**25 December, 1979:** USSR invades

Afghanistan, provoking large-scale migration of Afghans to Pakistan.

**14 June 1985:** Introduction of the Schengen Agreement. This established an area within Europe in which free movement of people is guaranteed and where the majority of internal borders controls are abolished and replaced by what is effectively single external border.

**15 June 1990:** European Union passes legislation that decrees that any EU State must examine the application for asylum seekers in the immigrant's arrival country. This became part of the Dublin system.

**31 December 1993:** The EU has accepted a total number of 504,400 refugees from the former Yugoslavia following the civil war.

**15 March, 2011:** Syrian conflict becomes civil war: this is still ongoing.(25)

**12 April 2015:** On April 12, 400 people were believed to have drowned after a boat capsized off the coast of Libya, and on April 18, 650 migrants drowned south of the Italian island of Lampedusa. On April 23, the European Council promised to triple funding for rescue operations aimed at migrant boats and discussed the migrant crisis at an emergency meeting. (26)

**4 September 2015:** Germany begins to take in large quotas of refugees trapped in Austria and Hungary. (27)

**11 August 2017:** Merkel met UN Refugee Commissioner Filippo Grandi on August 11 and pledged 50 million euros (\$59 million) to the International Organization for Migration and the UNHCR. She also pledged support to fight people smuggling via the Mediterranean Sea routes. (27)

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol are the core

of the international protection system for refugees around the world. (28) This must be viewed in conjunction with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which outlines the rights of all people regardless of their migrant status.

The 1967 Protocol is independent of, though integrally related to, the 1951 Convention. The Protocol removes the temporal and geographic limits found in the Convention. (28) The 1969 OAU (Organisation for African Unity) agreement followed this, and added to the definition of refugee the following: Persons who flee their countries “because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order”. (28)

In 1984, a group of government representatives and legal experts convened in Cartagena, Colombia, to discuss refugee protection in Latin America. (28) They formed the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, and this was adopted by numerous states in Central and Latin America. It states that it is necessary to *Reiterar a los países de asilo la conveniencia de que los campamentos y asentamientos de refugiados ubicados en zonas fronterizas sean instalados al interior de los países de asilo a una distancia razonable de las fronteras con miras a mejorar las condiciones de protección en favor de éstos, a preservar sus derechos humanos y a poner en práctica proyectos destinados a la autosuficiencia e integración en la sociedad que los apogee* (29) (reiterate that in countries of asylum the amenities of refugee camps and settlements located in border areas are installed within the countries of asylum at a reasonable distance from the borders, with a view to improving the conditions of protection in favour of preserving the human rights of refugees and implementing projects aimed at self-reliance and integration into the host society).

In 1994, the Arab Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries

was adopted by the League of Arab States (LAS), (28). However, this was never ratified and so never became an effective or binding contract. In October 2017, this was replaced by a new Arab Convention on Refugees.

In 1999, the European Union created a European Asylum System which operated off of “full and inclusive application of the Geneva Convention” (28). In 2001, Asian and African countries adopted the revised Bangkok Principles on the status and treatment of refugees. (28)

## **Possible solutions**

Because of numerous social and linguistic differences between the host country and the refugees' country of origin, it is essential that the government of a host country makes every effort to ensure that, firstly, the refugees are in good mental and physical health so that they can contribute fully and play a role in the integration process. The government of the third country should be able to thoroughly vet everybody that is granted refugee status, and in this process provide a full psychological evaluation. In the long run, this is beneficial as it allows all refugees to be treated if necessary or if not contribute to their maximum capacity in any event. As such, this will allow them to develop and maximise their potentials, as well as being able to engage in manual or non-manual labour.

As the majority of refugees are under 18, as stated earlier, governments of host countries may also wish to implement measures that guarantee that minors are granted protection. However, this protection should not necessarily be automatically revoked once the age of majority is reached if the refugee in question has not stabilised themselves, fully integrated, or managed to achieve the qualifications necessary for a working life in the country in question. This will help prevent feelings of isolation and affected development of minors which can in turn lead to difficulty in integrating.

Additionally, language classes should be provided for refugees in an environment in which they feel safe and free from discrimination or mockery, as this is often an obstacle towards them

learning the language. To build on this, a cultural exchange could be encouraged, in which refugees also share their culture with the local population so that they feel that they are contributing not simply by integrating but by giving back to the community that has taken them in.

Moreover, it will also be necessary for governments of host countries to recognise foreign qualifications, so that the skills refugees have become transferable and they are useful to the economy of the host country. For example, a Syrian medical qualification may not be transferable, but the fact remains that a refugee still has these skills and these could be used to fill shortages of medical professionals in, for example, Germany.

Lastly, sport and activities within the community are a possible solution. Sport is often a way that does not require intense or prolonged verbal or written communication by which anyone can involve themselves in a team, thus giving them physical motivation and a sense of community. It is also helpful in terms of releasing feelings of frustration and anger common among refugees.

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